Pender Among The Residents

By

Forrest Reid

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PENDER AMONG THE RESIDENTS

BY

FORREST REID

AUTHOR OF "PIRATES OF THE SPRING," "THE SPRING SONG," "AT THE DOOR OF THE GATE," ETC.

"Ah! Cattina, pour dormir tranquille, il faut n'avoir jamais fait certains rêves."

Lorenzaccio.

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To
Mrs. Frank Workman

PART I

THE ARRIVAL

I

CAPTAIN CHAFFINCH, being of a musical turn, paused for a moment outside Miss Foy's small house, or rather, outside the gate of her garden. Certain strains, on his approach, had revealed themselves as the opening bars of the waltz from *Faust*. They came brightly tripping to his ear, but of a sudden faltered, made a blind stagger at recovery, and—abruptly ceased. The captain, whistling the conclusion of the air for himself, passed on down the street, while the piano, unabashed, started upon a second attempt.

The piano was old, and its voice most tremulous and cracked. Some of the keys had a disconcerting habit, when struck, of not returning to their original position. One or two of them, even beneath the firm touch of Miss Adeline Burton, refused to respond at all. On these occasions a remote and wiry tinkle was all that could be heard, sounding from unfathomable depths within, but this plaintive tinkle, so feeble, so helpless, had no effect upon the younger Miss Burton ; she but pounded the harder, with a joyous determination that set the brass candlesticks dancing, and irritated her instructress nearly to the point of tears.

Every Tuesday and Friday Adeline Burton came for a music lesson, and every Tuesday and Friday, at the same point, in the same way, she broke down. Miss Foy always knew that she would. She waited for the crash and jangle of wrong notes with nerves on edge. As the dangerous passage drew near, her eyes

behind their glasses assumed a peculiar fixity, her breathing became audible. The insouciant Adeline, aware of these symptoms, increased the *tempo* recklessly; she attacked *con furore*, and then—bang, jangle, jar, and sudden silence.

"Let me *show* you, Adeline. I can't think why you should find those particular bars so difficult."

Miss Foy's voice was querulous, but fatally weak. Straightening her glasses and seating herself on the music-stool, which Adeline vacated with unnecessary alacrity, she played the awkward passage, while her pupil craned her neck to try to catch a glimpse of what was passing in the street. Miss Foy's bony fingers were stiff, her performance lacked confidence, though long acquaintance with the piano gave her a strategical advantage over that doddering instrument which Adeline did not possess. Miss Foy knew exactly which notes were dumb, and which, when once struck down, required to be deftly reinstated before again coming into action. Still, she preferred *andantes* to *allegros*, and even on a good piano technique had never been her strongest point. Somehow, while listening to her playing, one found oneself speculating as to whether she couldn't do anything for her neuritis—a preoccupation that interfered with a due attention to the music. Her glasses, also, were a drawback. Owing either to a weak spring, or to some peculiarity in the formation of the bridge of her nose, they had a trick of falling off at the most critical moment, and the sudden darkness that then descended upon Miss Foy invariably brought the piece to a conclusion. She was never asked to play in public; she played as seldom as possible in the presence of her more advanced pupils; nor could one even picture her as indulging in a little music for her own private entertainment.

One had an equal difficulty, it must be confessed, in picturing her as painting "in water-colours and in oils," doing "poker-work," studying "French," or even "English, literature." Yet of all these arts Miss

Foy was mistress. A printed circular found its way once or twice a year into the homes of most of the inhabitants of Ballycastle, reminding them of the fact. Nobody in Ballycastle had ever desired that a child of theirs should learn "poker-work," or "painting in water-colours and in oils." Nobody had ever expressed a desire to study "literature." Captain Chaffinch alone, on his first appearance in these parts, had inquired about the "French," and unfortunately a long residence abroad during his boyhood had rendered him ineligible. Miss Foy discovered that he merely wanted conversation, that he had an idea that it would be rather pleasant to drop back occasionally into bilingual habits: but Miss Foy spoke only *très peu*, and her *Grammaire des Grammaires*, in its neat linen cover, remained undisturbed upon the shelf.

A few little girls and three or four small boys were the only pupils she had ever secured. They came to her for music: nobody had ever come to her for anything else. Nevertheless, the "painting in water-colours and in oils," the "French," the "poker-work," and "literature," remained bravely in Miss Foy's prospectus, a perpetual challenge to Ballycastle culture. If the neighbouring youths and maidens grew up in ignorance of these things it would not be Miss Foy's fault. She did her best. She was there, on the spot, an accessible and far from expensive source of enlightenment—the rest obviously was a matter for her fellow townsmen.

Miss Foy hated teaching. Not so much because she knew she was incompetent as because it upset her. There were certain of the simpler *Lieder Ohne Worte*, for instance, favourites with parents, which awakened in her an anguish no human being should be called on to endure. She never gave a lesson but she felt afterwards that she had been either too severe, or too indulgent, and since she was, temperamentally, incapable of harming a fly, naturally it was her severity that bothered her most. She *did*, in point of fact, get cross with the little girls rather often: they were all

of them lazy, and most of them naughty as well. The little boys were lazy, too, but they were, somehow, nicer to her. The little girls were horrid: calm, supercilious, and precociously observant. None was so observant as Adeline. The child's eyes were like gimlets. Miss Foy dreaded their brightness and sharpness and hardness. "Now, try it once more," she said, rising from the piano, and fixing her glasses to an expression of severity. She became aware, at the same moment, of her pupil's abstracted back. "Adeline!" she cried indignantly. "I felt assured you weren't attending. You really *are* a most annoying child. I believe you were looking out of the window the whole time."

As this was perfectly true, Adeline adopted a tone of pained astonishment. "Oh, Miss Foy!" she exclaimed, twisting her pigtail and balancing herself on one thin black leg. "I only looked this minute—to see if mother was coming."

The marble clock on the mantelpiece chimed the hour: the lesson was over.

"Well, run along," said Miss Foy, shutting the piano. "And remember, I shall expect you to play the whole piece perfectly next Tuesday."

As a rule Adeline needed no second dismissal, but to-day she seemed to loiter deliberately. Very slowly she rolled up her music, and when this task was accomplished she still showed no eagerness to be gone. Instead, she walked again to the window, and actually pulled back the curtain to obtain a better view.

She was entirely self-possessed. It was only Miss Foy, watching her, who was flurried. Adeline's behaviour was beginning to get on her nerves. "What *are* you looking at?" she asked—a question to which the child did not reply. "Cross old cat," she merely murmured to herself, while Miss Foy fussed about with increasing exasperation.

It wasn't, she told herself indignantly, as if Adeline's reluctance to depart were prompted by the slightest

feeling of affection. She was not, even in her more agreeable moods, at all an affectionate child. "I'm sorry, Adeline," she said again, "but I'm afraid I shall have to get ready now to go out. I've a great deal to do this morning."

"I'm looking for mother," the child remarked, without turning her head.

It was the second time she had said it, but it was only now that Miss Foy attached any particular significance to the words. They awoke a faint flutter in her heart. A visit from a parent at such an hour—a visit, above all, from Mrs. Burton—was surely unusual. Though of a far from pessimistic temperament, Miss Foy was easily scared. She thought at once of the letter she had sent round a few days ago to the mothers of all her pupils—a letter she had put off writing as long as possible, and which she certainly would never have written at all had she not realised it to be absolutely necessary. She was sure now that Mrs. Burton had been annoyed by it: it was, indeed, exactly the kind of thing that *would* annoy her. "Is your mother coming to see *me*?" she asked, with a dim hope that it might be Adeline herself whom Mrs. Burton wanted.

"Yes. . . . Here she is." And the little girl, hastily retreating from the window, ensconced herself in the nearest chair.

Miss Foy, now genuinely alarmed, hastened to the door as a loud double knock sounded upon it; and a moment later Mrs. Burton, preceded by Wopsey, rustled into the room with an air of suppressed but determined hostility.

In appearance Mrs. Burton was not particularly terrifying. She was short and dumpy, with a small blobby nose and blue eyes that watered easily. Her complexion, which was a trifle raw, was toned down by powder. Her hair was of that yellowish tinge which never turns to gray, but merely becomes discoloured. She looked common, and she looked dowdy.

Her first action was to sweep her daughter from the room, and it was not till the hall door had banged behind Adeline that she sat down opposite Miss Foy, who, with hands folded in her black, dingy lap, tried hard to conceal her trepidation. A ray of sunshine entered by a side window, but Miss Foy had not the courage to get up and draw the blind, though it cost her a keen pang to see the sunlight spreading unrebuked over the carpet, picking out pale, gigantic, and hardly to be suspected pink roses with a joyous masculine carelessness. Everything in the crowded little parlour —including its forlorn and feeble owner—was already as faded as such things can be, yet Miss Foy continued to wage an unending war against the "busy old fool," who *would* stare in at her windows. The furniture had not been new even in the days of her girlhood. At that time it had adorned her father's manse. On his death, many years ago, she had brought every stick of it, including the dreary, musty books, to her present house, though how she had managed to cram it in there remained a perpetual mystery. It had been literally a case of cramming, and both Miss Foy and her visitors would have been a good deal more comfortable had she been able to bring herself to part with a few of the parental belongings. But this she could not do, and from a frame over the mantelpiece the parent in question, with an air of making an inventory, looked solemnly down now, while on one side of him hung a photograph of his wife, and on the other a more modern portrait, taken in New York, of Lucy Vansittart, Miss Foy's married sister.

Miss Foy sat motionless in her chair (she had chosen the least comfortable in the room) with the expression of one awaiting the verdict of a hostile jury. Mrs. Burton, also, impressively waited; while Wopsey sniffed at the furniture, and shoved his sharp little Pomeranian nose into everything.

An object invisible behind the ornamental screen in the fireplace seemed to fascinate him particularly,

and Miss Foy began to wonder anxiously what it could be. She was fond of dogs, in the same timid way as she was fond of little boys, but she did not care for Wopsey. To attract him from the screen she got up in search of a biscuit.

"I called about your extraordinary letter, Miss Foy," Mrs. Burton said. "I really don't quite understand it."

"Perhaps I—I failed to explain myself with sufficient clearness," Miss Foy began. "I——" She noticed that Wopsey, horrid little thing, had merely made crumbs of her biscuit without eating it, and was now once more devoting his attentions to the fireplace.

"Of course I understood that you had decided to raise your fees," Mrs. Burton said sharply. "*That* was plain enough. What I didn't understand was the reason why."

There was an aggressiveness in Mrs. Burton's manner that robbed poor Miss Foy of her last vestige of confidence. "It was just," she stammered, in tones hopelessly apologetic. "It was just that—— You see, since the war, the price of everything—— I mean, living has become so dear——"

The measure of her agitation could be gauged by the broken quality of this speech, falling, as it did, so far below the standard of precision she usually set herself, and Mrs. Burton, prompt to perceive her advantage, immediately dealt a further and more crushing blow.

"For that very reason I'm afraid we must all economise in such things as it is possible to economise in. Canon Burton does not feel that he would be justified in incurring any additional expense at present. . . . He has decided that after this quarter—particularly since Adeline seems to be making very little progress——"

Mrs. Burton paused, as if on purpose, to give Miss Foy a chance of withdrawing her ridiculous demands. At all events, this poor-spirited lady immediately availed herself of the opportunity.

"Of course, if you think it too much, Mrs. Burton—— It was not that I wanted to be grasping—— "

There was a crash in the grate as the ornamental screen yielded at last to the pertinacious Wopsey, who fled behind the sofa with a sharp yelp of terror. Mrs. Burton apologised, while Miss Foy hastened to find out what damage had been done.

The point of the fender had chipped the lacquer-work half-way up: otherwise the screen was uninjured. Mrs. Burton declared you would never notice it.

"There seemed to be something in the grate which attracted him," she added. "Wopsey, come here, naughty dog." Her tone implied that poor Wopsey was hardly to be blamed if Miss Foy chose to keep peculiar things in her fireplace.

"Then we may decide to let things remain as they were," she pursued, returning to the main question, when she had lifted the excitable Wopsey into her lap.

"Yes, if you don't mind."

Mrs. Burton relaxed at once. "Of course, I can quite see *your* point of view, Miss Foy, and I hope you understand that we would *like* to pay more, if we could. I think, in the case of many of your pupils, you are perfectly *right* to insist on a higher fee. In fact, you would be foolish if you didn't. It is only that we ourselves, personally, have had so many additional calls upon us lately—subscriptions to one thing and another. If it weren't for that—— I mean, if we felt we really could afford it, were really *justified* in paying a little extra, we should be only too delighted to do so."

She replaced Wopsey on the carpet and rose to go. "I hope your clock is fast, Miss Foy. I haven't a moment now I can call my own, from morning till night. I'm sure it will be a blessing when things begin to get normal again. We have to meet this morning at Mrs. O'Clery's to discuss the bazaar."

"Isn't there plenty of time for that?" Miss Foy

answered dejectedly, conscious of having put up a miserably poor fight. "It won't take place before August, I suppose."

"We haven't decided. Miss Tonie Ronayne thinks we ought to have a kind of open-air fête this year, with side-shows and things. She says the visitors would prefer it, but I don't know; I don't see how we could manage it unless my cousin, Mr. Pender, lent us Ramoan."

"How is Mr. Pender keeping?" Miss Foy asked, as she followed Mrs. Burton to the door.

"Much better, thank you. You knew, I suppose, that he was coming home this afternoon? We had a wire yesterday."

"Yes, I heard from Dr. Olphert. He also had a wire."

Mrs. Burton raised her eyebrows. A look of annoyance crossed her face, and it was with a vexed little laugh that she said, "How odd Rex is!"

"Dr. Olphert was surprised himself. Neither of us has met Mr. Pender since he was a little boy. I don't suppose——"

"Even his own relations haven't met him very often," Mrs. Burton interrupted, "so it's hardly surprising that you and Dr. Olphert haven't."

"No," Miss Foy agreed.

"The Easter before the war we happened to come across him when we were abroad," Mrs. Burton went on, more cordially. "It was at Florence, and of course we joined forces for the rest of our stay. It was then that he and Norah first came to an understanding, but the poor child has hardly seen him since. It has been a dreadfully anxious time for her, and indeed for all of us. However, now it's over we mustn't complain."

"Are they to be married soon?" Miss Foy asked, after a perceptible hesitation.

"Yes, quite soon, I think." And Mrs. Burton smiled complacently. "Rex, I fancy, will see to that."

"I'm sure he won't remember me," said Miss Foy.

"He appears to have an excellent memory, or he could hardly have remembered Dr. Olphert. . . . We often wanted him to come to stay with us in the old days," she added dreamily, "but while his grandfather was alive I suppose he didn't like to."

Miss Foy gave a little gasp. She could believe much, but she could *not* believe this. For she knew—oh, she knew positively, without the faintest glimmer of doubt—that never, never, never, while old Mr. Kilmartin was alive, had Rex Pender been asked to stay with Mrs. Burton. She knew, too, or at least she felt morally certain, that it was entirely Mrs. Burton's fault that Pender's first visit to Ramoan House had also been his last.

"You taught him his lessons, didn't you—that time he stayed with his grandfather?" Mrs. Burton recollected graciously. "It must be nearly twenty years ago!" The contemplation of this rapid flight of time seemed to awaken in her a more pensive mood, and she gazed at Miss Foy as one might gaze at an unromantic ruin.

"Mr. Kilmartin asked me to assist him in his studies," Miss Foy replied. "But I'm afraid I was not very successful."

She sighed. She was quite capable of reproaching herself even now for her failure of twenty years back. "I thought he was a dear boy—so pleasant and so kind. But he had counted on his visit being a holiday. He did not want to do lessons. I have always considered that Mr. Kilmartin made a mistake in insisting on them."

Mrs. Burton raised her eyebrows again. This vein of reminiscence apparently struck her as rather more tender than was quite suitable. Nevertheless, she answered, "Yes, he was a charming boy." She suddenly laughed as at a more intimate recollection naturally unshared by her companion. "Do you remember how absurdly fond of cake he was?"

Miss Foy did not remember: that is to say, her

memory called up an entirely different picture from the one painted by Mrs. Burton's happier fancy—a picture she refrained, however, from communicating.

Mrs. Burton said good-bye, and Miss Foy returned to her parlour, where the first thing she did was to shut out the intrusive sunlight. But her thoughts were busy with the past. She felt curiously rebellious as she fussed about with a duster, and swept up Wopsey's crumbs. Mrs. Burton's powerful imagination had at least done her this service, that it had made her lose sight of present troubles in an indignant repudiation of her visitor's version of the affairs of twenty years ago. She had not dared to contradict her, but she would have loved to have done so, and also to have told her how she actually *had* behaved. And, for some mysterious reason, what annoyed her as much as anything was Mrs. Burton's remark about Pender's fondness for cake. "He may have been as fond of cake as any other boy," she said aloud, "but if he was, he certainly did not gratify himself at *your* expense. . . . Besides, he wasn't that *kind* of boy." Miss Foy suddenly ceased from dusting, and smiled softly—till she remembered that he was twenty years older than when she had last seen him, and that he was coming home to marry Norah.

II

HALF an hour later Miss Foy sallied forth to do some shopping. It was the middle of May, and summer had set in brilliantly. The green tennis ground, sunk in the bed of the old walled harbour, was a well of light; the sea a blue, glittering fire. White gulls floated on the shallow river mouth, and the sun blazed down on everything—on the distant headland, on the heights and hollows of the golf links, on the Marine Hotel at the corner, and on the straight, hilly street up which Miss Foy now walked, taking very short steps, and looking, somehow, extremely unimportant.

Miss Foy, of course, *was* unimportant—perhaps even more so than most people. She had no one dependent upon her. She was as unattached as any human being could very well be. Nobody knew better than herself that had she at this moment ceased to exist it would have made not the slightest difference either to her friends or her enemies. There was not even a cat or a dog to miss her should she fail to return home, and she had sometimes reflected that, if anything *did* happen to her, probably it would be Mrs. Burton who would express the greatest concern, since death invariably altered Mrs. Burton's opinion of people, opening her eyes to qualities life had tended to obscure, and furnishing her with a wealth of sentimental reminiscence too circumstantial to be contradicted.

Miss Foy, however, had no time to waste on philosophic speculation just now. The practical difficulties of existence shut out everything else. They loomed before her, insurmountable, blank, and gray as the walls of a prison, sordid, unromantic, too, as actual prison walls, capable of being summed up with dreadful brevity in the single word "bills."

Miss Foy had reduced her purchases to the barest

necessaries of life, yet her bills did not get smaller. What she could do more than she had already done was hard to imagine. She was not naturally of a saving disposition. All her instincts were in the direction of generosity, if not of positive extravagance, and to be forced perpetually to think of money, to check every impulse that would lead to even the slightest increase in her expenditure—never to be able to give a present —never to be able to entertain her friends—never to be able to join in what other people were doing—was to her a kind of spiritual starvation. Yet this was how she lived. She lived with an imposed carefulness that made life an unceasing and dismal calculation; and with all her calculating, with all her carefulness, she now saw the end. Mrs. Burton's visit that morning seemed to mark the failure of her last desperate expedient, and no other suggested itself except the very doubtful one of selling her possessions, of giving up her house, and going into lodgings.

Miss Foy as she pursued her way, with the recollection of Mrs. Burton still fresh in her mind, could not help keeping a nervous look-out for other parents. She knew it would be better to take the bull by the horns and call on one or two of them, but an unconquerable shyness held her back. She could not—just now, at all events—face a repetition of that morning's scene. Nothing was left to her but such comfort as might be extracted from the hope that Mrs. Burton was exceptional.

Half-way up the street she paused at a shop, over the door of which, printed in large gold letters, were the words: "J. McCracken, Family Grocer, Wine and Spirit Merchant." Miss Foy went inside. Behind the counter stood both Mr. McCracken and his wife, but it was to Mr. McCracken's end of the shop that Miss Foy, after a stiff little bow to the lady, advanced.

"Good-morning, Mr. McCracken."

"Good-morning, Miss Foy."

Mr. McCracken smiled with unprofessional geniality,

while he rubbed his large freckled hands softly up and down the sides of his linen coat. "They're giving us the good weather early this year," he remarked pleasantly. "I hear every room in the town's let between June and October."

"Indeed! Of course, the accommodation is really rather limited. . . . I want half a pound of margarine, please."

Miss Foy was not one of those persons who are unable to distinguish between margarine and butter: she was naturally fastidious, she hated margarine, but for that very reason it was the more economical to buy it. Mr. McCracken's broad, beaming face seemed to acquiesce in the wisdom of the order.

"Certainly, Miss Foy. Can I send it for you?"

"No, thanks; I'll take it with me."

"Certainly, Miss Foy."

At that moment a voice from the other end of the shop broke in coldly. "Perhaps Miss Foy would like to settle her account, James. I think there's three months owing."

Mr. McCracken scratched his head and smiled again, a trifle uncomfortably. "I must have mislaid that account," he murmured apologetically. "I had the whole house ate for it this morning and never got it in me mouth."

An indescribable, yet ominous sound, between a sniff and a snort, was the only reply this confession elicited. Mr. McCracken parcelled up the margarine and handed it to Miss Foy, who placed it in her knitted bag, conscious, while she did so, that the sharp hard eyes of Mrs. McCracken were fixed upon her in a searching scrutiny. Miss Foy knew that both the McCrackens knew that she did not want to settle her account. The shredded wheat, the sugar, and the three eggs she had intended to ask for, were left unmentioned, and she was about to leave the shop when Mr. McCracken spoke once more.

"So we're going to have Ramoan open again!" He rested his finger-tips lightly on the counter.

"Yes, I believe so."

Mr. McCracken leaned slightly forward with an air of one imparting secret information. "Mr. Pender will be here this very afternoon. Mrs. West was in yesterday ordering things to go out to the house at once. They tell me he's hardly better yet, and not long out of hospital. . . . Don't you want your sugar, Miss Foy? You didn't get any this week."

A faint flush rose in Miss Foy's thin and faded cheeks. "Thanks. I have a little left, but perhaps—if you're likely to run short——"

Miss Foy received the sugar guiltily, under the basilisk glare of Mrs. McCracken. She hated taking it, yet could not refuse. Then, with a gentle "Good-morning," and a still feebler "Good-morning, Mrs. McCracken," she left the shop.

On the threshold she almost ran into Dr. Olphert, who immediately slackened his pace and walked beside her.

Miss Foy smiled out of a mist of depression. She liked Dr. Olphert; she liked him better than anybody else in Ballycastle; and their rather odd friendship had led her to evolve the theory that there was a safety and a virtue in bigness. At any rate she had noticed that a certain type of nature and temper seemed to go with it. In big dogs, for instance, she had invariably found the particular qualities she meant, and judging from Dr. Olphert, and also from Mr. McCracken, the analogy held good in the human sphere. Miss Foy was obliged to deny herself a big dog, because he would eat too much, but there was no reason in the world why she should deny herself the friendship of Dr. Dick Olphert, and, to her fancy, he really did suggest a large, black, rough-haired retriever. The resemblance was not merely moral and spiritual; it was to be traced in such physical characteristics as the bushy black hair and beard, the deep voice, the brown intelligent eyes, though these were aided by a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles.

The Doctor paced beside Miss Foy (it was impossible

for him to keep step with her) with a slow, loose-limbed stride, while he begged her to allow him to carry her bag; but this she would not permit.

"It is quite light," she said primly, "and you would look ridiculous carrying a marketing bag." Her private opinion was that Dr. Olphert cared far too little for appearances, and more than once she had felt inclined to tell him so, since he was a bachelor, and had nobody to look after him. Often his coat needed brushing: and he had a habit of smoking a pipe and walking with both hands in his trouser pockets, which was distressingly unprofessional. They were there now—his hands; and his hat was tilted backwards, and there were crumbs on his waistcoat.

"Are you going to meet Mr. Pender this afternoon?" she presently asked. "I expect the Burtons will be there."

"I am," the Doctor replied. "He wired to me to meet him."

"He telegraphed to them also," said Miss Foy. "I saw Mrs. Burton this morning."

The Doctor looked surprised. "But not to meet him at the station? He doesn't want that. He's ill."

"Not so very ill," Miss Foy objected. "Mrs. Burton told me he was nearly all right again."

"She knows nothing whatever about it; he's suffering from a nervous breakdown. And what he wants at present is to see as few people as possible."

Miss Foy looked a little dubious, and the Doctor looked suddenly cross. She foresaw difficulties. She knew how unceremonious Olphert could be, and she had a vision of Mrs. Burton, who already detested him, standing helplessly on the platform, while he bore Pender away.

"He was very badly wounded, wasn't he?" she asked doubtfully.

"So I believe: but the other is the thing that matters now."

Miss Foy made no answer. She realised only too

clearly from his tone that Dr. Olphert did not intend to budge an inch from the programme he had laid down. If Pender had not been so ignorant of the existing state of things, she would have considered that the sending of these two telegrams showed a want of tact.

"Even as a little boy he struck me as being delicate," she remarked after a brief silence. "Not that he was at all sickly."

"At all events, he was sound enough for them to pass him for active service," the Doctor replied. "And he came through nearly four years of it, which means he must be fairly tough. . . . What did Mrs. Burton say?"

Miss Foy waited a moment before answering. "I told her you had had a telegram. I thought it might be better for her to know beforehand."

"So that she could come fully armed—eh? I suppose she was highly indignant?"

"She seemed surprised at his remembering you," Miss Foy returned evasively.

"I was surprised myself. I can't imagine how he knew anything about me, or even that I was still here. . . . He must have heard it from the Burtons."

"Probably from Norah. . . . And of course you were great friends when he *was* here. You came to the house every day."

"Well, it's a good many years ago now. I can't have been more than sixteen at the time, and he was even younger. And he only stayed for a month or two."

"He wasn't much younger," said Miss Foy. "He was small for his age."

"He seemed younger, anyway. I remember him quite well, as a matter of fact, so I suppose it's not really astonishing that he should remember me. . . . It's only that I haven't seen him, or heard of him, for so many years."

"He was inclined to make a hero of you then," Miss

Foy smiled gently. "You were so much bigger and stronger: you also had a very dreadful reputation, I'm afraid. He used to follow you everywhere like a shadow. I remember Mrs. Burton speaking to his grandfather about it."

"Yes, it's the sort of thing she *would* do," the Doctor grunted. "She'd think I was corrupting his mind and his manners. . . . I don't know why it is, but, from the beginning, that woman has regarded me as her natural enemy."

"Perhaps it may have been because nobody had much control over you," Miss Foy suggested. "To us it seemed as if you were allowed to run wild. Everybody in those days used to wonder what would become of you."

"Well, I haven't grown up particularly wild," the Doctor retorted, "and she still holds precisely the same opinion. . . . Pender was quite a decent little chap," he added reminiscently. "You were rather fond of him, I think."

Miss Foy coloured. "I did like him," she admitted. "But I . . . I shouldn't have thought you would have noticed it."

The Doctor's strong white teeth gleamed beneath his moustache with a sort of good-humoured ferocity. "I may have been a savage," he said, "but I was never a fool. . . . As a matter of fact, I noticed it rather particularly. I gathered from it that you were a friend of mine, too, you see. It would have been quite easy for you to have taken up Mrs. Burton's attitude—which I may tell you I was also perfectly aware of—and in that case my visits to the house would have come to an abrupt end—a rather violent end, I dare say."

Miss Foy stifled a sigh. Her short-sighted eyes, behind their crooked glasses, seemed focused on a point in the distant past. "I'm afraid Mr. Pender's recollection of *me*, if he has any, will not be a pleasant one. . . . I fear we are only too apt to dislike those who have

taught us—especially if they have taught us in holiday time."

The Doctor laughed. He laughed at a good many of the things Miss Foy said. Then he harked back to the original point of their discussion. "At that time Mrs. Burton wasn't so keen about him. If she objected to me, it wasn't because she was fond of Pender."

"You must remember he is engaged to Norah now," Miss Foy replied quietly.

"And also that his grandfather after all didn't make a new will."

Miss Foy hesitated. She very rarely attributed unpleasant motives to anybody. Motives of another kind she found so much easier to follow. "I don't think Mr. Kilmartin acted quite fairly," she said. "He always behaved as if he intended to leave nothing to Mr. Pender; and in that case Mrs. Burton naturally——"

"Wouldn't have needed to change her views. Don't imagine I want to stand up for the old man. Everybody knows he was an unmitigated scoundrel. But I should like to hear Mrs. Burton's revised opinion of him."

Miss Foy, however, made no attempt to gratify this curiosity. "He might at least have left her a small legacy. Nobody could have been more attentive to him than she was. There was hardly a day that she did not call."

The Doctor chuckled. In anybody else one might have suspected a veiled irony, but Miss Foy was as incapable of irony as she was of highway robbery. "I know. That's just it. If the woman wasn't quite such a fool I could perhaps sympathise with her more. Don't you see that her only chance was *not* to call quite so often? It is extremely probable that if she had stayed away she would be living at Ramoan now. As it was, she simply disgusted the old man into forgiving Pender."

But Miss Foy was bent on doing Mrs. Burton justice. "You don't understand. You have no idea how trying Mr. Kilmartin was, of the rages he used to get into.

It really must have been dreadful for Mrs. Burton. And he was so—peculiar—that I can't help thinking he sometimes deliberately led people on for the sheer pleasure of flying into a passion with them. I heard him myself order poor Canon Burton out of the house simply because he read him a sermon which Mr. Kilmartin had asked him to read. And all this Mrs. Burton put up with."

Olphert laughed. "It *is* rather tragic, of course. Was it one of the Canon's own sermons?"

"It was. Mrs. Burton had repeated to Mr. Kilmartin some complimentary remarks which had been made about it, and he insisted on hearing it, though, as you know, even then he was an avowed agnostic. Naturally the Canon was flattered. He brought it himself the very next afternoon and read it aloud. I was in the room at the time—Mr. Kilmartin insisted on my remaining—and as soon as he had finished, instead of thanking him, Mr. Kilmartin said he had only wanted to find out if he was really such a fool as his wife made him out to be. The Canon, of course, was very much hurt, and could not help showing it. Considering the provocation he had received, and the humiliating position he had been put into—before me—I don't know how he was able to reply so mildly as he did. I must say he displayed the most Christian spirit. But anything like that, I'm afraid, was wasted on Mr. Kilmartin. He simply flew into a passion. Finally he told the Canon to leave the house and take his sermon with him. . . . But I need not repeat the expressions he used."

"No; I dare say I can puzzle them out. . . . And I suppose Mrs. Burton went back next day to apologise?"

"She came back, but not until several days had elapsed. Really, Dr. Olphert, I think you are unfair. Mr. Kilmartin, you must remember, was her uncle."

"Yes, I remember. . . . What was the row with Pender about, by the way? *He* didn't come back."

Miss Foy's steps quickened. A faint flush of agitation suddenly appeared in her cheeks. "I don't know. I mean I don't know the exact particulars. And I don't know how it began. The final trouble had to do with his parents—Mr. Pender's parents—particularly his father—and I have always felt that Mrs. Burton was in some way responsible." She paused, as if reluctant to reveal her real thought. "She certainly carried tales—tales which I know were very greatly exaggerated—to Mr. Kilmartin. I hope I am not doing her an injustice, but if she was not the actual cause of the trouble, at least she did nothing to remove it. I'm afraid, though she gained so little by it in the end, I shall never be able entirely to forget the way she acted at that time. It is perhaps wrong of me to harbour thoughts that may be uncharitable, but my opinion of Mrs. Burton will always be coloured by—by her behaviour then. It was *not* disinterested."

"If you mean by that that she tried to bag everything for herself, you're probably right," the Doctor laughed. "It's certainly what she *would* do if she had a chance."

"Of course Mr. Pender has no idea——"

"Mr. Pender, I fancy, has a pretty clear idea," said Olphert good-humouredly. "If not, he's a much bigger fool than he used to be."

Miss Foy regarded him for a moment nervously. "And Mrs. Burton's feelings towards him now——"

"Are completely changed. That also was to be counted upon." He watched Miss Foy's perturbed face with an amused twinkle in his eyes. "Besides, she's got him for Norah. There's nothing really for her to be disagreeable about. . . . I should like to know, all the same—just to satisfy my curiosity—exactly how often she saw Pender between the time when he was sent back home in disgrace, and the old man's death."

"She told me she had invited him several times to stay with them," answered Miss Foy conscientiously,

"but that he had always refused to come. When they met him abroad after his grandfather's death, it was by chance."

"I see," the Doctor nodded sardonically.

"She told me so," repeated Miss Foy.

"Did she? Well, it doesn't much matter now, either way. And I prefer Norah to her mother."

Miss Foy again turned a doubtful gaze of inquiry upon him. "Don't you think she's—in some ways—rather harder than her mother?" Her glasses glittering in the sun, seemed to search anxiously for what the Doctor really *did* think. "It has always seemed to me that Norah is—worldly."

"She's not any harder in her treatment of me," Olphert declared, "though that, too, runs in the family."

Miss Foy was about to ask a further question, but checked herself. They had now reached her door, where they stood for a moment while she fumbled in her pocket for the key.

The Doctor watched her, a smile still lingering on his face. "Why didn't you give me *that* to carry?" he asked, as the key, very large, and made of iron, was at length produced. "I don't believe I could possibly have lost it—even if I'm not to be trusted with a bag."

"The lock is excellent, though old-fashioned," Miss Foy replied simply. "Will you kindly remember me to Mr. Pender."

"With pleasure; but I'm going to bring him to call on you very soon."

Miss Foy turned the key. "Good-bye, then;" and she would have entered the house had not Olphert still detained her.

"I say, you know, what do you *think* of this engagement to Norah Burton?"

A distinctly startled expression came into Miss Foy's face: she knew from Olphert's voice, from his eyes, from his smile, that he was on the point of suggesting something alarming, and possibly scandalous.

She felt inclined, indeed, to retreat before he had time to do so. "In what way?" she asked faintly. "What do you mean?"

"Well—when exactly *did* they become engaged—and where?"

"In Italy—before the war. Mrs. Burton told me so herself."

"Quite. . . . But wasn't the George Best affair rather later than that? And why have we seen nothing of Pender at Ballycastle? After all, soldiers, even on active service, *do* get occasional leave."

"Norah did see him," Miss Foy protested loyally.

"And the Best boy? She saw him also. What do you make of that romantic episode?"

"I don't make anything of it," said Miss Foy. "I know nothing about it."

"You must know that when Best was here, he and Norah were always together. *He* managed to get leave."

"He came to stay with his aunt—with Mrs. O'Clery," said Miss Foy.

The Doctor shook his rough head, sadly, reproachfully. "This is sheer prevarication," he declared. "You know he was infatuated with the fair Norah, and that she certainly did not discourage him. I wonder had he heard of this engagement? *I* hadn't. Had you?"

"I don't quite remember when I first heard of it," said Miss Foy, stepping into the hall. Fortunately, the Doctor did not pursue her thither. Having enunciated his ingenious slanders, he stood watching their effect upon her, apparently with profound enjoyment.

"I wonder if he has ever heard of Pender?" he added, as he lifted his hat, and before she had time to close the door.

III

OLPHERT, who at the last moment had been kept by a patient, found the train already in the station when he arrived. He had very little idea what Pender would look like, but from afar he espied a group of Burtons and knew that he must be the centre of it. The presence of the younger members of the family afforded the Doctor considerable amusement. He wondered why Mrs. Burton, who usually had some esoteric motive for her actions, should have thought it necessary to bring them. For they were all there, the entire family, from the mild-faced old Canon, with his lack-lustre and wandering eye, down to the spindle-legged Adeline, and a fat, sleek-headed youth of eighteen or so in a carefully-creased flannel suit.

Deliberately the Doctor slackened his pace, so that, as he was still almost the entire length of the platform away, he had time, while he approached, to obtain a fairly good view of the stranger in their midst.

And he was a stranger. The Doctor had an impression of a general leanness and haggardness, of a sallow face, oval in shape, in which the very dark gray eyes were curiously alive and arresting. It was not, below the wide forehead, the face of an ascetic, yet the sensuality in it seemed strangely to express a kind of spiritual force. Pender was clean-shaven, his nose was straight but rather thick, his skin dry as parchment; and the lines running from the nose to the wide, straight, sensitive mouth, the lower lip of which was perceptibly thicker than the upper, were deeply marked. Assuredly he was not at all the type of person one would expect the Burtons to come to meet. He was unusual, difficult to place. He might have been a priest, but one guessed he was not. Even his nationality was questionable. The Doctor was inclined to pride himself on his powers

of observation and deduction, but he felt that had he not already known Pender to have been simply an assistant schoolmaster in a secondary school before he had joined the army, he certainly would not have gathered this from his appearance. He looked odd and intelligent and horribly ill, but he did *not* look like the average instructor of youth.

Nor, the Doctor thought, did he look very much like the lover of Norah Burton, who stood beside him, graceful, cool, and beautiful, with that serene and simple beauty which seems hardly to belong to the modern world. The small head, the waved, red-gold hair, the delicate ear, the rhythmic line from neck to ankle—those things were Greek. And Norah herself —well, perhaps Norah, too, was Greek. At any rate, even when she had been younger, softer, and when his admiration had been less purely aesthetic, he had always felt she was unapproachable. She was young still, of course, but somehow at present he was rather thankful that she *had* been unapproachable. She reminded him of a story of Prosper Mérimée's, *La Vénus d'Ille*, and as he watched her with Pender he had even a qualm of misgiving. He wondered what had brought them together. He was inclined to find the solution in his friend Mrs. Burton. Love is capricious, and Mrs. Burton was an admirable manager : between them, no doubt, much might be accomplished.

These impressions and speculations passed through his mind while he advanced unhesitatingly, if slowly, and received Mrs. Burton's reserved greeting with a bland smile which he fancied annoyed her. Mrs. Burton, he suspected, was haunted by an idea that she amused him. She had always disliked him, even in his boyhood, but only a repeatedly wounded vanity, he imagined, could have engendered the particular feeling with which she regarded him now. A dignified coldness characterised her attitude as a rule, but there had been occasions when the dignity as well as the coldness had fallen into abeyance.

Mrs. Burton had then revealed the true depth of her animosity. Once she had gone so far as to cut him, and Olphert remembered it as a delicious experience. Whether people had been present to witness his rebuff or not, he had continued to bow to Mrs. Burton, and in the end she had given in. How could she help it? What chance had she—hampered by a respect for appearances—against a person of his sort—obviously without the instincts of a gentleman? Mrs. Burton, lapsing from a standard of strict veracity, had subsequently hinted the most various and anomalous things against him. She had even, he knew, overstepped her customary prudence so far as to make statements that were definitely actionable; yet, though his moral reputation may have suffered, she had never succeeded in injuring him professionally, and the Doctor rather enjoyed the gossip which, sooner or later, inevitably reached him.

To-day he responded to her reserve with geniality. He was genial with each member of the family in turn, and only slightly less so with Pender. But he had come to the station with a definite purpose in view, and a very short time indeed elapsed before he mentioned that his car was waiting. Mrs. Burton, whether she heard him or not, took no notice. She seemed bent, for her own reasons, upon keeping Pender standing on the platform as long as possible. She had a hundred questions to ask and a great deal of sympathy to convey. Meanwhile a porter mounted guard over the luggage.

Mrs. Burton was voluble, enthusiastic, and affectionate. She wanted Rex to know how proud they all were of him. She appeared unable to wait for a more favourable opportunity to hear about his experiences at the front and in hospital. She had much to say about "Tommies" who had come home wounded, and whose leisure hours she had solaced, so that one of them had written to her after he had gone back again to the trenches. She knew the letter by heart, and was able to repeat it. It was delightfully full of fun, and

Mrs. Burton pointed out the fun with pertinacity. It contained allusions to "Blighty."

"You can put the things in the taxi," Olphert called out to the porter before she had finished. He spoke to Pender: "My car's only a two-seater. I'll run you up to the house in it, but there's no room for your things."

Mrs. Burton gave him a single look. It now appeared that she also had engaged a taxi: there were two to be hired in Ballycastle. Both belonged to Mr. Lannigan of the Fisherman's Rest, who himself hovered in the background, though what he had come for was not quite clear, since the chauffeur was already in possession. Neither was it clear why Mrs. Burton had engaged his car. Miss Foy certainly had told her of Pender's wire to the Doctor, but Mrs. Burton said she had understood that Pender was coming to the Rectory first—she had counted on that—she had not dreamt of anything else. The Doctor, having spoken once, waited indifferently.

The question seemed left to Pender himself to decide, and Mrs. Burton's eyes were fixed upon him in a look whose significance it was difficult to misinterpret. He turned to Olphert. "It's really awfully good of you," he said in a low, pleasant, slightly hesitating voice. "I hadn't the least right, I'm afraid, to ask you to meet me. I dare say it has upset all your arrangements."

"It hasn't," replied the Doctor. "It's a part of them, or I shouldn't be here."

"You'd better *both* dine with us this evening," said Mrs. Burton reluctantly, and addressing herself exclusively to Pender. "Then, later, I dare say Dr. Olphert could drive you home."

The Doctor chuckled audibly. It was the first time he had been asked to the Rectory, and the invitation, and particularly the manner of it, gave him immense pleasure. "I'm going to drive him home now," he said, turning his gaze full upon Mrs. Burton. "You seem to forget that he's still an invalid."

Mrs. Burton bridled. "I don't think dining with us would seriously injure him, but perhaps we might allow him to answer for himself."

The Doctor continued to gaze approval. He appeared, indeed, to take a curious delight in the situation. But Pender smiled a little wearily, and with the courteous evasiveness which had characterised his attitude from the beginning.

"I'm afraid I'm entirely in Olphert's hands," he said. "It was very stupid of me not to explain things more clearly. If I had thought of it, Cousin Nellie, I should have insisted on your all arranging to dine at Ramoan with *me*."

"I don't think there's much use in keeping him standing here, mamma, at any rate," Norah at this point intervened. "You *look* tired, Rex," she added with a friendly little smile, "and I'm sure Dr. Olphert's plan is much the wisest."

Mrs. Burton, abandoned by her own family, gave way. "Well, Rex," she said, "if either Theodore or Jack can be of the slightest use, don't hesitate to say so. I'm sure they'll be only too delighted to go with you——"

"The car holds two," said the Doctor phlegmatically, "so I'm afraid Jack will have to walk."

Mrs. Burton did not even glance at him. "I wasn't suggesting that he should go in *your* car," she returned acidly.

"Oh, I'd forgotten. Of course you've a taxi there of your own." His face expressed an unabashed good-humour as he took out his pipe and began to fill it.

Mrs. Burton turned to Jack, who had been hanging rather in the background, rattling the money in his pockets with a slightly bored air. He emitted now a vague noise which may or may not have expressed an eagerness to accompany his cousin. The fact was, he had at that moment caught sight of the younger Miss Stevenson, a maiden still in the flapperish stage, but possessed, nevertheless, of considerable personal

attractions. Demurely unconscious of the interesting scene taking place so close to her, the younger Miss Stevenson was even now receiving a parcel from the hands of the station-master. A lightning glance out of the tail of her eye, however, had reached the rather sluggish Jack, and it was that youth's firm intention to carry, if possible, this parcel for her.

"Oh, there's really nothing for any one to do," Pender assured them politely. "And Mrs. West is there to look after me, you know."

"In that case I think I'll toddle on," Jack remarked with suspicious alacrity. "Well, cheerio!" And shaking Pender's hand, and with a nod to Dr. Olphert, he left the others to do as they pleased.

They gazed after him.

"He's going to catch up Mabel Stevenson," Adeline explained brightly, being a child from whom no secrets were hid. "He's a bit balmy on her at present."

"Don't be vulgar, Adeline," said her mother sharply. She seemed on the point of calling her son back and insisting on his going to Ramoan. But Jack's departure had set an example, and the others now moved in the direction of Olphert's car. Here they said their final good-byes, Pender promising to come to the Rectory for lunch next day. With a last waving of hands, and of Adeline's dirty pocket-handkerchief (promptly confiscated by Mrs. Burton), Pender and the Doctor started.

IV

THE horn hooted as they turned in at the tall, iron gates of Ramoan, and a minute or two afterwards the car drew up.

Viewed from the front, the house presented a bare and gaunt appearance—lop-sided, too—for a wing had been added at a later date to the main building. The site had been ill-chosen ; the house stood in a hollow, from which the ground behind sloped steeply upward. The brick walls were dark and discoloured, and the trees on either side had gradually encroached upon them, till their branches overshadowed and here and there actually brushed against the windows. But gloomy and forbidding though its aspect might be in winter, just now, in the late afternoon, with the sunlight bringing out all the sombre colour of its crumbling brick, and glittering in reflected fire from the narrow upper windows, it seemed in Rex Pender's eyes only beautiful and desirable. He was tired and ill, and he had come home. . . . He felt, indeed, as if he had come home for ever. The house was for him the living, grasped token of rest and peace and beauty ; the surety of its welcome was grateful as sleep or love.

The Doctor would have said good-bye to him here, at the foot of the high steep doorstep, with its black iron banisters, but Pender insisted on his coming in. He insisted on his staying for dinner ; and afterwards, while the doctor smoked a cigar, they sat on in the long, dark, narrow dining-room where, in spite of the warm weather, Mrs. West had a wood fire burning.

The windows were wide open, and Pender, leaning back in a deep chair, had the light full upon his face. More even than in that first impression, when he had seen him standing on the station platform surrounded by Burtons, the Doctor was struck by the fatigue and

haggardness of his appearance. The faint smile which at the present moment lingered about his mouth and eyes seemed to increase rather than minimise this effect. His hands were extraordinarily thin. The straight, smooth, black hair, growing scantily about his forehead, and falling into separate wisps that clung closely to the outline of the skull, seemed dank, like the hair of a sick man; while the perfect immobility of his body made more manifest a restlessness of spirit that shone out from his dark eyes. Olphert, as he looked at him, and took in these features one by one, was afraid that his recovery was still far from complete. He did not ask him any questions; to-morrow would be early enough for that; but already he had come to the conclusion that time and rest would do more for Pender than the skill of the physician.

He put down his empty coffee cup in silence. He had dined better than he usually dined, and he felt content with all the world, even with Mrs. Burton: but Pender's dinner, though beforehand he had declared himself ravenously hungry, had consisted of half the wing of a chicken and a glass of sherry.

The Doctor, who from the beginning had hardly contributed his fair share to the conversation, continued to smoke in silence. Yet his silence had not that devastating effect which is produced by the silence of a person who is bored. It had a sympathetic quality. It was quite obvious that he was not racking his brains for something to say; he was perfectly comfortable, and would speak when he had anything he wished to communicate; but until then he would hold his peace. It was a habit that had frequently been found annoying, for there were persons in whose company the Doctor *never* felt moved to communication. It was a habit undoubtedly selfish and undoubtedly lazy, yet Olphert was neither a selfish nor a lazy man.

Pender, at any rate, did not object to it: it enabled him to be lazy too. "Well, I'm glad to be home," he said, "and I'm glad I didn't allow you to accept Cousin

Nellie's invitation. . . . It was rather wonderful, you know, to find your relations with Cousin Nellie practically unchanged—after all these years. It carried me back, straight back, to old times."

The Doctor made no immediate answer. He might have been pondering some abstruse problem. But at last he said dryly, "It was quite like old times, too, wasn't it, to leave me to fight your battles for you?"

"If you mean by that——" Pender began.

"I mean by it that I got all the blame, while you shared all the benefits—just as in the old days. . . . *Your* relations with Cousin Nellie apparently *have* altered—more even than I had expected."

Pender smiled. His smile was pleasant, almost boyish, much younger than anything else about him. "Cousin Nellie knows me now, you see. She knows I was led astray by bad companions—was weak, perhaps, but never deliberately sinful. . . . She knows I never poured a jar of treacle into her letter-box after nightfall. She said at the time it was a 'dastardly' thing to do, and she was perfectly right."

"The treacle episode is a good example of what I have been saying. The entire blame was heaped on my shoulders. She always firmly believed that I alone did it. For that matter, she believes it still."

"Don't for heaven's sake re-open the question," Pender cried in alarm. "If you've borne the blame for so many years, you can surely go on bearing it."

"You encouraged me: I shouldn't be surprised if it was you who supplied the treacle, but I forget that part of it. She simply hit upon me because she disliked me. She never had the slightest vestige of proof, yet when I denied it she called me a liar."

"Yes, I remember that. I remember it because I was surprised at the time by your making such a fuss. Considering the yarn you actually *did* come off with, your attitude, you know, was a little supersensitive."

Olphert shook his head.

"And it wasn't *only* because she disliked you,"

Pender went on. "She really felt quite certain that I wouldn't pour treacle into her letter-box. To begin with, such a thing would never have occurred to me. . . . It must have made a horrible mess."

"I've no doubt it did. That was the intention, wasn't it. . . . ? I wonder if the postman shoved the letters in amongst it, or if they discovered it in time ? "

"Well, don't begin to gloat over it," said Pender. "If you expect me to be still capable of going round 'treacling' with you, I may tell you that I'm now completely civilised."

"You always were," Olphert growled. "You were the most civilised little beast I had ever clapped eyes on. That was why I was so pleased to find it was only skin-deep—that beneath it lay many beautiful capacities for sport, or what I then considered to be sport. It was the treacle, after all, that cemented our friendship."

"Yes—it's the sort of thing treacle might do," Pender mused. "As a matter of fact, you were rather decent to me. I'm not really ungrateful. I can see now I was the kind of kid who always has to be hauled out of scrapes by his pal—the one who's always caught if there happens to be a chase, who always falls in if there happens to be a ditch, who always succumbs if there happens to be a scrap."

"Still—you wanted to do things," said the Doctor generously, "and that was good enough for me. It didn't particularly matter that you were pretty nearly certain to come to grief over them."

"No, I expect not. Very little *did* matter to you then."

"Some things did: not things of that kind. . . . Do you remember Miss Foy ? "

"Miss Foy. . . . ? She read aloud to grandfather, didn't she ? She used to come in the morning and stay all day, and she cried over me when I was sent home after the row. I didn't at all like her crying, I'm afraid. I was too furious at the time to want that kind of sympathy. . . . What became of her ? "

"Oh, she's still here," Olphert dropped carelessly.

"In fact, she sent her kindest regards to you, and hoped you'd come to see her. She teaches music now, but not very successfully. The war hit people like Miss Foy harder than anybody else." He paused for a moment, and then brought out deliberately, "I've an idea, you know, that she was very much on your side."

Pender looked up as he caught the unexpected emphasis, but almost immediately he looked away again. There was a silence—a silence which lasted for a long time. Neither knew what was passing in the other's mind, though Olphert alone, perhaps, was curious to know. Pender sat dreaming, but he was not dreaming of Miss Foy. In the fading light his face had lost something of its wornness and weariness. The lines had disappeared from it, and he was now much more like the Pender Olphert had known in the past, the Pender of his boyhood. He half sat, half lay, in the big chair. His eyes, narrowed to two dark slits, were fixed upon the darkening windows; and it was without moving, without altering the direction of their gaze, that he at last said, "Do you know, I very nearly missed all this?"

"This?" Olphert, busy with his own speculations, which included the re-establishment of Miss Foy at Ramoan, in some vague capacity not yet decided on, failed to follow him.

"Missed coming back here—and—everything."

Olphert was still puzzled. "Why? How could you miss it?" he asked. "I don't quite understand what you mean."

Pender shifted his position ever so slightly.

"Grandfather wrote to me a few months before his death, telling me to come to see him. I refused. . . . I wouldn't have come when I was a boy if my mother had not made me, though of course I didn't know then all I have learned since."

"Then he *did* write!" the Doctor repeated thoughtfully. "It never occurred to me that he had written.

He must have wanted to 'make it up,' must have wanted it pretty badly, too, or he wouldn't have taken the first step. He was obstinate as a mule."

"I dare say. . . . But things can't be patched up like that—at the last moment. It's very easy, when there's nothing else left, to be sorry. He treated my mother abominably—simply because she disobeyed him when she married."

The Doctor had been fumbling for his pipe, and he now proceeded to fill it. He leaned forward a little towards the fire. What Pender had said interested him, but he knew very well there was another side to the story, though the other side might have been, probably was, greatly exaggerated.

"Why exactly was he so dead against the marriage?" he asked. "It wasn't only because he thought it—socially unsuitable, was it?"

Pender waited until Mrs. West, who had come in to light the lamp, and to arrange decanters and siphons within reach, had again gone out. Then he replied,—

"I suppose you have heard various tales?"

"Of course. One always does. On the other hand, one always makes up a tale of one's own which differs considerably from the others."

"Probably a good deal of what you heard was true," said Pender simply. "My father was *not* a very satisfactory person, in any sense of the word. Naturally I was kept in the dark as far as possible; but it is extremely difficult to keep a youngster of twelve or thirteen in the dark. Children are horribly observant; and one may take it for granted that the fewer questions they ask, the more they know—that is, if they are intelligent and sensitive children. I don't think I asked any questions at all. I didn't want to. Certainly I didn't want to ask them of my mother. I'm not denying for a moment that grandfather had right on his side. He was perfectly right, in the beginning, to refuse his consent to the marriage. But he was miserably ungenerous afterwards. Usually people with

violent tempers are supposed to get over an injury quickly. *He* seemed to treasure his injuries, and brood over them, in the way a poet might brood over a lyric. He was as vindictive as an Old Testament divinity. Whatsoever was sown must be reaped ; and he appeared to derive enjoyment from watching an exceptionally rich harvest. Though, after my father's death, he knew exactly what my mother's circumstances were, he never offered to help her. He would not see her ; he would not answer her letters, except through a secretary —your friend, Miss Foy. . . . Once he demanded that I should be sent to him on a visit ; and you know how that ended. . . . It was little wonder that when he did write, five or six years ago, I took no notice of the letter. I had lived for thirty years without his assistance, and I could live for thirty more."

Pender spoke quietly. His face for a moment or two had grown bitter, but this expression passed. " Of course," he added indifferently, " I never understood him. Perhaps he had not really ceased to care for my mother. People are sometimes as hard to themselves as they are to others, and for all I know he may have been like that. I dare say, indeed, that if he had ceased to care for her he would have forgiven her."

" I don't think he was happy himself," Olphert volunteered dispassionately. " If he had been, it would have been impossible for him to have been so consistently disagreeable to every one he met. People chatter about the ennobling effect of unhappiness. I have never observed it. An unhappy man is a dangerous man, and in nine cases out of ten a selfish, narrow, and ill-tempered one. Certainly your grandfather was."

" Do you think I should have refused everything ? "

The Doctor stared. " Refused what ? "

" The house—the money—all this. . . ." He made a slight movement with his hand.

Olphert replied with equal bluntness. " No, I don't. I'd have thought you a damned fool if you had."

Pender shrugged his shoulders. "It was my first idea, you know. But I hadn't the courage, the strength, the—whatever you care to call it."

"I've just told you what I call it," said the Doctor. "I don't think such behaviour could be expected even from the hero of a novelette. The only person who would have seen its beauty is Mrs. Burton."

"Well, I didn't do it," Pender answered gently. "As you see, I am here. . . ." His gaze moved slowly round the room, losing itself in the black shadows that floated beyond the radius of the lamp-light.

The Doctor blew forth a cloud of smoke. "You aren't afraid of finding it dull?"

"Dull?"

"Of course, I don't see why you should, particularly —except that you've been used to living in towns."

"No, I shan't find it dull."

"It will be a change all the same."

"I hope so."

He was silent for a moment or two before he added, "Very nearly any change, you see, must be for the better. It is really rather a happy position to be in, if one looks at it like that."

"You mean—after soldiering?"

"No; I mean after everything. All that period between our last meeting and this seems to me even now horribly depressing. . . . We were poor, you know: not comfortably, frankly poor; but indecently, furtively poor. I ought to have been put out to work at something, and I'll say this for myself, that that is what I wanted. But I was supposed to be too clever to be wasted on business. There were consultations, reductions of fees; everybody was tremendously kind, and I nearly killed myself working for scholarships. . . . And then, in the end, it turned out that I wasn't so very much of a phœnix after all, wasn't clever in the right kind of way; and I developed, too, an irritating habit of falling ill just before examinations. But I

got a degree; and I got a job in a second-rate school; also I spent a great deal of time in writing verses that nobody wanted, and prose that nobody wanted. My mother, the only person who might have been pleased to see me started on this dazzling career, died during my last term at college, and I myself would have been a good deal happier in a bank. Teaching is really very poor fun if you dislike it, and at the same time happen to strike your pupils as a person to be ragged. You have no idea of the torture a herd of little fiends can inflict. Even the brief truces are strategical—mere workings for openings in an elaborate and endless game. It seems to me remarkable that *my* particular demons should not have grown up into so many Neros and Caligulas, yet I have met several of them since, and they appeared to be quite ordinarily decent and dull young men—rather sentimental, in fact, in their references to the 'old school'—and, taken singly, disarmingly, pathetically at the mercy of any one with brighter wits than their own. They seemed even to imagine that I must naturally like them—we had all had such a jolly time together. It's amazing."

The Doctor smoked quietly for a little. "Well," he said at last, "you've a perfect right now to do what you like for a while."

Pender smiled. "I'm going to 'do what I like' for quite a *long* time," he said. "When I understood how near I had come to missing everything by inopportunely dying—before I had done any of the things I wanted to do—I made up my mind about that. I never *have* done what I wanted to do. I hated being a soldier nearly as much as I hated being a schoolmaster. I dare say there are people who are not particularly affected by their surroundings—at least there are people who say they aren't—but I am not one of them. My surroundings have always swallowed me up. They ruined my temper and my health and my peace of mind. I can't describe to you the feeling I had when I suddenly found myself free. Then the war broke

out, and my freedom was cut short. I joined up. I didn't want to: I didn't even believe that I'd be any good: but somehow I felt that I must. My second freedom came a few weeks ago. It came when I knew I was going to get better. I had no doctor's assurance about that: the doctor's assurance followed later: but I was quite sure in my own mind. I simply woke up one day with that feeling firmly rooted in me, though where it came from, or what it was based on, I couldn't have told you. It was simply there, and at the time that was sufficient. . . . It was spring, and very early in the morning. Nobody else was awake. But the sun had risen, and there were two or three sparrows squabbling somewhere outside the hospital. I felt nothing very clearly—except that I was going to get well, and that the crossness of the sparrows made me extraordinarily happy. I was so happy, and at the same time so horribly weak, that I laughed, and then cried, though doubtless I lay perfectly quiet. I don't believe I was really very firmly attached to my body then at all. I was somewhere under a low, wet sky, here at home; and there were wet leaves, and there was coolness and brightness all round me, touching me, touching me so that I felt it. . . . It is rather strange that ever since I began to get better my senses seem to have become more alive. Alive is not the proper word. I could put it scientifically by saying that they react to a much slighter stimulus than before. What used to be a half tone has now the value of a full tone. Is that possible, do you think; or is it only a matter of one's nerves being still a little queer? The smell of flowers, for instance, has become too violent for me to care to have them in the room. One of the nurses brought me a lot of violets, and their scent made me dizzy. It seemed to beat against my brain in dark purple waves. I could actually *taste* it. The cooler, paler smell of leaves and grass is pleasanter to me now. . . . And it is the same with other things. If I had to live in London I think I should go mad in

a fortnight. . . . If I had to listen to a symphony concert I should go mad at once. . . . Those are really my most alarming symptoms, and I hope they aren't *too* alarming. At any rate, now you know them, you will be able to prescribe for me."

"I fancy your own prescription is as good as any," said Olphert. "When you've taken it easy for a month or two everything will come right."

"Do you think so? Mentally, you see, I am in pretty much the same condition. Do you ever read poetry? There is a poem of Henry Vaughan's that I kept repeating over and over again to myself during those first days. It seemed to me the most beautiful poem in the world, and it still seems so :—

'Happy those early days when I
Shined in my Angel-infancy!
Before I understood this place
Appointed for my second race,
Or taught my soul to fancy aught
But a white, celestial thought;
When yet I had not walked above
A mile or two from my first Love,
And looking back, at that short space
Could see a glimpse of his bright face;
When on some gilded cloud or flower
My gazing soul would dwell an hour,
And in those weaker glories spy
Some shadows of eternity;
Before I taught my tongue to wound
My conscience with a sinful sound,
Or had the black art to dispense
A several sin to every sense,
And felt through all this fleshly dress
Bright shoots of everlastingness.

O how I long to travel back,
And tread again that ancient track!
That I might once more reach that plain. . . .'

That really expresses my present state of mind far better than I can express it myself. . . . Do you understand what I mean? I somehow feel as if I *had* travelled back—a little way. The very fact that I should tell you so, and repeat such a poem, is a kind of proof that I have, isn't it? It is only when you have travelled back that you are able to talk of things like that. In your angel-infancy, Olphert, you didn't care in the least what you said. You don't care very much now, I dare say, but then you were perfectly willing to bore everybody, though quite determined not to be bored yourself."

"I never was an angel-infant," the Doctor replied, "and I've never seen one."

"Still, don't you think we were once ever so much nicer than we are now?"

"No, I don't."

A shiver of wind passed through the trees outside, with a faint, ghostly sound. The Doctor rose and looked out into the night. "We are going to have a change soon," he said, walking over to the windows, and closing one of them. "I shouldn't be surprised if it came before morning."

"I don't much mind if it does," answered Pender. "I want rain, I think, more than anything else—rain on the leaves and grass—the soft sound of it—summer rain—cool and clean. . . . So long as you don't get wet going home, of course," he added, with his faint, slow smile. "Yet I'm glad, too, that the sun was shining when I arrived."

The Doctor had returned to the hearthrug. "Do such things matter to you?" he asked, leaning back against the mantelpiece, and looking down at his patient.

"They have mattered lately. Signs and wonders, omens and dreams, have filled my soul. If it had clouded over just as we reached the house, it would have made a difference."

"I see."

The Doctor glanced at his watch, and he did not again sit down. "If it's wet to-morrow you had better not venture out," he said. "It would be very easy for you just now to catch cold, and that is the last thing you must do. I'll drop round probably some time during the day."

"But you're not going, are you?" Pender protested, as Olphert moved towards the door.

"I am. I've kept you up too late as it is."

V

"The lady sleeps! Oh, may her sleep,
Which is enduring, so be deep!
Heaven have her in its sacred keep! . . .
I pray to God that she may lie
Forever with unopened eye,
While the dim sheeted ghosts go by!"

EDGAR POE.

PENDER returned to the dining-room after seeing Dr. Olphert off. He sat down again in his chair before the fire. He knew he would do better to go to bed, but he was reluctant to make the necessary exertion, and the warmth and comfort of the fire held him by its spell.

He had come home . . . and he began to think of what his return really meant. He had discussed it with Olphert, but had deliberately left out of the discussion what was infinitely more important than anything he had mentioned. He wondered now if the Doctor knew he was engaged to be married. Surely he must know, yet, if he did, it was rather strange that he too should have passed by in silence a matter that must colour everything, influence everything, alter everything. Shut in with his own thoughts, Pender could not pass it by. He knew that for months he had done so—had accepted it, that is, without dwelling on the inevitable consequences of his acceptance. Now he felt it was too late to draw back, too late to do anything. . . . He went over the whole thing from the beginning. He dwelt, indeed, deliberately upon the beginning, as if in that lay the promise of the future; and as he did so the walls of the room in which he sat slid out noiselessly and disappeared, giving place to the coloured light and shadow of an Italian city in early autumn.

He saw again the line of old houses by the Arno, the sleepy yellow water, the old bridges, the hill rising to San Miniato. He saw the shops with photographs, the shops with prints and books, the narrow streets, the gray stone buildings, the open squares, the battered façades of ancient churches. He heard the perpetual noise—noise of electric trams, noise of ramshackle, rattling carriages, noise of excited drivers. And amid all this there passed a ceaseless stream of tourists, and in the very centre of that stream, tossed to and fro, curiously helpless, like boats that had lost their rudders, the Burton family.

The Burton family, not caring particularly for pictures or for churches (though devoting a good deal of time to both), not particularly good at finding their way about by the aid of fluttering maps outspread at street corners, yet rather reluctant to pay for being driven—the Burton family, somewhat unhappy, in short, and very much at sea—had brightened up wonderfully on his appearance. He had discovered them at the Villa Trollope, whither Mrs. Burton had been attracted by its literary associations. Thomas Hardy had written *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* at the Villa Trollope, and Mrs. Burton, though she had not succeeded in getting his room, had been allotted one immediately opposite. She did not, it appeared, care for *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*; she had not been able to get any "help" from it; still, it would be interesting to be able to say that she had lived in the house in which it had been written. She seemed to think, so far as Pender could gather, that it cast about her some sort of dim and esoteric distinction; it was almost as if the book had been dedicated to her; and she informed him that her paper for the Literary Society next winter would be on Thomas Hardy.

As president of the Literary Society, Mrs. Burton, he perceived, felt at home in the Villa Trollope. There were other visitors whose qualifications she suspected, but then, one never knew. Mrs. Florence Barclay had

stayed there; she had stayed much oftener, indeed, than Thomas Hardy. Quite a number of celebrated people. Their names were given in the little book one got when one wrote about rooms. Seated at her own small family table, Mrs. Burton appeared to have an excited feeling that masterpieces were being secretly concocted all round her; she had a feeling, which she mentioned to Pender, that here she was closer to the heart of things than ever before. . . . Mrs. Barclay was expected back in November.

Still, it was annoying that the table d'hôte was not more general. It was annoying, as she also mentioned, that one should be condemned to talk to the Canon and Norah and Jack when one might have been conversing with the author of *When it was Dark*. That was the drawback of the separate tables. In moments of discouragement Mrs. Burton was inclined to think that the promises of her little book had not been fulfilled, and that she might almost as well have been staying at an ordinary *pension*. Nevertheless, her conversation during meals was invariably either literary or artistic. She kept a roving eye on the occupants of other tables, and an ear cocked to catch scraps of significant conversation. She referred, for some impenetrable reason, frequently to George Meredith.

Pender, who had not met any of the Burtons since the change in his fortunes, was at first not very sure of his ground. But Cousin Nellie had soon set that all right. He had been rather stupid about Cousin Nellie. He was rather stupid about her still. He did not even yet fully grasp that Rex Pender, an impecunious young schoolmaster who had hopelessly offended his grandfather, who had no prospects, who had neither the manner nor the temperament of a young man likely to get on in the world—Rex Pender, in short, to whom, in his rather shabby clothes, one did not in the least wish to press the point of one's relationship—was an entirely different person from Rex Pender of Ramoan House, that eligible bachelor, with charming

tastes, and a habit of paying for things when Mrs. Burton had only Bank of England notes, which it was naturally inconvenient to get changed. He was inclined to think he must have exaggerated Cousin Nellie's coldness in the past. He still did not particularly care for her, but he now found an excuse for certain of her former actions in the simple fact that she probably disliked boys. A great many people did, as he knew, and it was a mental foible which eight or nine years of schoolmastering enabled him to understand.

But in truth he had not bothered much about Cousin Nellie. His mind was not of the sort to rekindle the ashes of a burnt-out emotion, whether of love or hatred. He lived in the present, and the present in this case consisted largely of Norah—Norah very simple and candid, very pretty and fresh among these old Italian things. Swayed to a mood of sentimental tenderness by the beauty of his surroundings, Pender had yielded to the luxury of falling, or imagining he had fallen, in love. And Norah had returned this feeling. She had told him so. Cousin Nellie, rather unnecessarily, had told him so too. The days that followed had been full of a happiness not in the least passionate, but innocent, light-hearted, and perfectly sincere.

It had only been afterwards, when he was far away from everything, that a ceaseless stream of impalpable dust had begun to fall upon the brightness of those days. The dust had fallen rapidly, yet imperceptibly. He was not conscious of it; it never occurred to him that he had ceased to care for Norah; it was only that he had ceased very much to think about her. It is true that on the few scattered and brief occasions when he had obtained leave, and when they had met again, he had felt pangs of uneasiness. Those meetings had been entirely friendly, but they had been unaccompanied by any of the rapture of lovers reunited. Half-heartedly he had tried to revive the earlier emotion —to revive at least the atmosphere in which it had come to life. He had talked of their first meeting in

Italy; of places they had been to together, of pictures they had looked at. But Norah had done little to help him; she had seemed, indeed, rather disconcertingly unaware that he needed to be helped, that anything was wanting in their present relationship. She was perfectly willing to talk to him of Italy; she was perfectly ready to express an opinion about anything she happened to remember (much readier, in fact, than in the old days); but these opinions, from which the reflected glow of his own enthusiasms had long ago vanished, revealed a mental attitude that appeared to him now as less naïve than commonplace. Norah's surviving impressions were for the most part connected with hotels, and the minor incidents and mishaps of travelling. When it came to the discussion of what he himself cared for, Pender was more struck by the number of things she *didn't* remember than by anything she did. . . .

Still, all might have been well. It was that black, crucial period of his first weeks in hospital, he felt—when he had come so close to actual death—which had altered him. Certainly, on his return to life, he had found himself different, and no echo even of the old feeling remained. . . . He had not expected to recover; he had expected it so little that he had made no struggle, but from the beginning had abandoned himself to the deep silent river which seemed to be bearing him along to the unknown. He had drifted on and on through the twilight, and then, instead of passing into the deeper quiet and darkness that was so near, had one day found himself emerging into sunshine, had found himself actually scrambling ashore. But he had come out, as it were, washed clean of the past; his engagement, he told himself, had never really been quite serious; and he had discovered a positive hope, sufficiently extraordinary under the circumstances, that Norah would adopt a similar point of view. . . .

All this, and more than this, drifted to and fro through

his mind as he sat there before the glowing fire. The meeting at the station to-day suggested nothing. He might have been, he probably would have been, delighted to see Norah again had no other relation than that of friendship existed between them. . . . Perhaps it was only that he had not yet quite recovered: perhaps everything would come right when he grew stronger, when he was once more near her. . . . Different solutions suggested themselves—solutions that argued, to say the least, an astonishing optimism. But the kind of courage required to break things off sharply was not the kind of courage he possessed. He could shut his eyes to the future, but he could not stretch out his hands boldly and clutch that future by the throat and strangle it. . . .

After a little, possibly to distract his thoughts, he took out a pocket-book, and began to turn over its contents. He glanced at two or three letters and tore them up, throwing the pieces into the fire. Then he drew from its envelope a letter from Cousin Nellie.

He had received it in hospital; he had even rather enjoyed it then, it was so characteristic. Cousin Nellie was an idealist. She loved beautiful thoughts; she loved at any rate the sound of them; and the vision of Pender lying wounded in hospital had inspired her. She longed to be with him, to look after him. She felt nobody else could look after him as she could. There followed a page or two in which she explained why she did not come. Theodore had been feeling poorly (she fancied he must have caught a chill), and Adeline's birthday would be that day week—they were letting her invite a few little friends to tea. She herself had been feeling far from well lately, but that would never have kept her back, and at any rate she wasn't going to talk about *her* little ailments after all *he* had come through. The only thing that brought her consolation when she pictured Pender lying there, was the thought of the brighter future which seemed now so near. She talked of clouds rolling away, of the

dawn that succeeds darkness : all this part of her letter was singularly rich in figurative language. She alluded to "home fires," and to Pender's in particular. She spoke of Norah, of Norah's anxiety, of her desire to be by Pender's side. But when he had reached this point, though still two pages remained unread, he dropped the letter into the grate.

And he looked at no others. He stirred the fire, and drew his chair closer to it. He shivered a little as he bent towards the red glow. He felt much more tired now than he had admitted feeling to Dr. Olphert : he was afraid he had already caught that chill the Doctor had been so anxious to prevent.

Probably a fire was burning in his bedroom upstairs, and certainly he would be better in bed ; but the lassitude of weakness made him reluctant to move. He looked round the room, and despite the problem of the future a mysterious feeling of excitement was revived within him. This house and all its belongings were strange to him. He had never properly explored it, even in his boyhood : he did not know, for instance, who those very quiet people were who looked down upon him from the black, panelled walls. Most of them were in shadow, for the long, narrow room was incompletely lit by the single crimson-shaded lamp which burned in the centre of the table ; but now and again a ray of firelight would flicker across some dusky canvas, and a face, a hand, be momentarily revealed, with a ghostly effect of life. The stillness was intense, and he was all the more aware of it because for so long he had been unaccustomed to silence even at night. This silence was deep and dark and enveloping ; not exactly disquieting, but sufficiently unusual to keep his mind and senses alert ; and he began to fear he should pass a wakeful night.

The flame of life within him no longer burned so brightly. It seemed to flicker and wink oddly, like the life that flickered and winked from the four penumbral and pictured walls. Presently he got up and lit two

candles, and with one in either hand began to make a slow tour of inspection. Straight in front of him, above the huge fireplace, hung, in gloomy state, the stiff and formal portrait of a gentleman—presumably a Kilmartin. It may have been his great grandfather, Pender thought, for the dress was less old-fashioned than that worn by some of the other persons who were watching him so closely. He did not like the portrait: there was something slightly forbidding in the large, empurpled, and heavy-jowled face. For all its air of pompous rectitude, the little eyes were slightly piggish, the mouth greedy and cruel. He examined each picture in turn. In one—a mere pencil sketch hidden in an out of the way corner—he even imagined he caught a faint resemblance to himself. It was the picture of a youth, little more than a boy, slight and delicate-looking, with an impetuous, eager expression in the eyes and the parted lips. The fancied likeness vanished as he stood before it: the picture itself grew not so pleasing. He imagined that instead of to himself he could now detect in it a dim resemblance to the self-satisfied, elderly gentleman above the fireplace. The likeness was in the mouth: it was—— That is, if it were there at all. Perhaps he was mistaken here also, for this face assuredly had beauty, though not a spiritual beauty. *This* Kilmartin, whoever he was, must have been quite different from the other bearers of his name—a hard-featured and unprepossessing lot—unimaginative, narrow, horribly narrow, he was sure, and more than a trifle vindictive.

With one exception, too, their mates appeared to have been fittingly chosen: or were the ladies, possibly, daughters of the house? That one exception hung beside the large pompous gentleman he had first scrutinised. A trying position for her. Beauty and the Beast. Crabbed age and youth. Pender resolved to relieve her of a companionship so unsuitable, and one, he was sure, she would have found singularly distasteful in life. He found it difficult to understand

how she could have come here at all. The youth in the corner, for all his difference, he could now see quite clearly was a Kilmartin. But she was not. She must have married somebody. But whom?

The unknown face, with its broad brow and pointed chin, its not quite simple beauty, as of a creature undomesticated, but felinely, deliberately gracious, returned his gaze with a subtle provocativeness. It aroused his curiosity. It was strangely alive. It seemed somehow on the point of becoming aware of *him*. Pender, half unconsciously, began to spin a web of fancy round her. Her air of primness was obviously assumed in malicious mockery of certain of the other ladies there. She had been posed—posed under the jealous vigilance of the pompous and slightly apoplectic person who looked at present straight out beyond her and across the room; and every time his back was turned she had caught the artist's eye with a derisive grimace of secret understanding. In the demure depths of her gaze he could catch a ghost of that grimace now, of that secret understanding; and it somehow made her more attractive, if less innocent. How had she ever come, in her pink muslin and black velvet ribbons, in her big beflowered hat, into this curiously alien world of guardians and frumps? She could not possibly keep up her present just-out-of-the-schoolroom air. He found himself smiling at her, and caught the ghost of a smile on her full red lips. . . . Perhaps she was the sister of the youth in the corner: but could that large, pompous person then—the person who read prayers every morning and the lessons in church on Sunday, whose frown at the breakfast-table was the signal for general gloom and a silence broken only by fearful whispers when butter or toast had to be passed—could he possibly be Papa? Even in spite of Papa, Pender was certain that she frequently came down late, and after the storm, under the shadow of Papa's newspaper, conversed with her brother by signs across the table. . . .

The wax was running down the sides of the candles and over the heavy brass sconces when he replaced them on the chimney-piece. He extinguished the lamp and went upstairs to bed. But as he reached the first landing a sudden weakness seized him, and he leaned heavily on the banisters for a minute or two before ascending the second flight. The fire in his room had burned low, was already dying. And when he had undressed, and was in bed, it was as he had expected —he could not sleep. He had drawn up the blinds, and outside, in the moonlight, he could see a dark, heavy branch waving close to the window; and sometimes the faint tapping of leaves sounded on the pane. He felt now seriously unwell; his mind was besieged by feverish fancies; he turned restlessly from side to side. . . .

Suddenly he awoke out of a broken dream. His brief sleep had not refreshed him. His limbs ached, and even the weight of the few bedclothes was intolerable, so that he threw them off, and lay with only a single covering over him. But very soon he began to shiver. He felt as he had felt once in hospital. He would have rung the bell, but he could not face the effort he must have made to get up and cross the floor to the fireplace. Out of doors, there was the sound of heavy rain, and of an uneasy wind wailing mournfully through the trees. A feeling of intense depression descended upon him; the night seemed everlasting, yet he had no desire for morning; and in the darkness he lay and wondered if he had come home after all only to die.

PART II

THE INVALID

A LOW rustle of wind among leaves seemed to sound all through those first days when Pender lay prostrate beneath a brief but sharp attack of influenza. During that time he saw nobody but the Doctor and Mrs. West. Now, however, fumigated, disinfected, though still confined to the house, he was well enough to begin to chafe a little at imprisonment. Not that there was much to attract him out of doors. All round the house, as if hanging from the heavy branches of the trees, a gray mist shut out the world beyond. And the Doctor was firm ; he, too, would take no risks. Pender, who had reached the intermediate stage of dressing-gown and slippers, was not even allowed to wander from room to room. The house was full of doors and passages ; it was draughty and cold ; he was confined to two rooms which were kept at a uniform temperature.

In one of these, the dining-room, he sat now before the fire, a pipe in his mouth, a large pair of scissors in his hand, and round his chair a kind of barricade composed of piles of old magazines and newspapers. He was perfectly content ; he had no fear of being disturbed ; and the dismal drip, drip, drip of water dropping from the eaves outside heightened rather than diminished his sense of comfort.

For the past hour or two he had been rummaging amongst his papers, looking over drawings, searching for unreprinted articles and stories by Henry James, every now and again cutting something out and laying

it on the table beside him. These spoils had been produced by Mrs. West, who had revealed the existence of a whole cupboard full of them by the startling suggestion that they should be taken away and burned. "Rubbish—only gathering dust," Mrs. West had declared. Rubbish! Precious files of the old *New York Nation*, and *Sydney Bulletin*, with unprocurable Phil May drawings he had never before seen!

Pender turned the pages carefully, slowly, for the task was a pleasant one. So absorbed was he in it, that when the door of his room was suddenly opened to admit visitors, whose approach he had neither expected nor heard, he started guiltily, and rose to greet them with the abashed and shamefaced air of a schoolboy caught playing with his sister's dolls.

Cousin Nellie stared at the amazing litter on the floor; at the chairs, all of which appeared to be occupied; at the large pair of scissors; at Pender himself, with bits of white paper decorating his dressing-gown. She entered the room, bringing with her a chill, damp breath from the outer world, and a strong odour of disinfectants. After the first natural pause of astonishment, however, she bore straight down upon the invalid and conferred upon him a kiss.

There was something highly official about this embrace: it welcomed Pender, as it were, back to the land of the living, and at the same time, and even more, it welcomed him, as prospective son-in-law, into the heart of the Burton family. Being accomplished in silence—that is to say, being unaccompanied by words, for in itself it partook rather of the emphatic and noisy order of caresses—being accomplished above all with an air of almost religious gravity, it produced upon the recipient a feeling that Cousin Nellie had formally adopted him. The feeling was disquieting. This was the first kiss he had yet received from her, and he had a sense, in his unpreparedness, of not properly rising to the occasion. It would have been difficult perhaps, impromptu, to have determined

what the occasion demanded, but in Cousin Nellie's eyes it was evidently one of mysterious importance. Pender's attitude, as he still grasped his scissors, was a little like that of a small boy unexpectedly patted on the head by a teacher whose portrait he has just chalked up on the wall outside. For a moment he even forgot to welcome Norah, who followed more leisurely in her mother's wake.

"What *have* you been doing?" Norah laughed. "It's rather hard to get near you. You're like the Sleeping Beauty, only the hedge is a paper one."

Cousin Nellie, however, experienced less difficulty. Periodicals were periodicals, and with a bold hand she swept aside a year or two of *Galaxys* and sat down in their place. Pender himself hurriedly anticipated any similar movement on the part of Norah by clearing a chair for her—the chair on which she had already turned her eyes.

"I've been looking over some old papers," he explained a little unnecessarily.

"So I should have gathered," Norah replied. "But what do you want to cut them up for? Aren't you making rather a mess?"

She was still amused as she gazed round at the litter on the carpet. "Rubbish," he felt, would be her word for it too. "There was a time, you know, when you'd have been scolded for doing this," she went on gaily, "and made to clear it all up again into the bargain." She began carelessly to turn over the drawings on the table beside her, though it was obvious, from the cursory glance she gave them, that they did not interest her. As he watched her mixing them up, and breaking the edge of each while she held it out for ironical inspection, he felt an increasing, if suppressed, annoyance.

"Well, Rex, you haven't told us yet how you really are," Mrs. Burton said. "Of course, we heard the Doctor's report every day."

"Oh, I'm practically all right again, thanks." But

he was unable to give due attention to Cousin Nellie; Norah was really doing too much damage.

"You must be very careful," Mrs. Burton insisted sombrely. "I think you're looking better than you did on the day you arrived, but influenza is treacherous. What you need now is a tonic to build you up again."

"I'm taking a tonic," Pender murmured. "I take everything the doctor orders." He paused to watch Norah, who had just allowed a page of Henry James to flutter to the ground.

"I wish you wouldn't mix them up," he expostulated feebly. "Those are only articles: there are no pictures among them."

Norah immediately put down the batch of papers she held. "Sorry. I didn't know they were so precious."

He flushed. Her instant compliance, and the dryness of her tone, made him feel rather a fool. "It's not that," he said, "but they're arranged in the order of their dates, and I want to keep them in that order."

She laughed. "What do you want them *for*? Are you making a scrap-book?"

"No."

But he knew that she thought he must be doing something of the kind, and knew also that it would be quite impossible to get her to see any difference between such a task and his own particular fad. He became, moreover, at this point, painfully aware that a drawing of Forain's, lying on a chair almost under Cousin Nellie's nose, would strike that lady as a thing emphatically *not* to be collected. He wished he had placed it in a less conspicuous position.

"But your food, Rex?" Cousin Nellie pressed him. "Have you a good appetite? You ought to eat as much as you possibly can. I'm going to send you over another chicken jelly, and you must promise me to finish every scrap of it."

Pender had not yet begun the last, but he reiterated his thanks, while Cousin Nellie at the same time discovered the Forain. He saw her look at it, and then

look at it again. He saw her stretch out her hand and turn it face downward. There was a pause. Then, "Chicken jelly is most nutritious," Cousin Nellie said with austerity.

She rose from her chair and for a moment he did not know what she intended to do. But she only remarked, "And now I think I must have a little chat with Mrs. West."

He protested. He had a strong foreboding that the little chat would lead to domestic difficulties later on. But Cousin Nellie merely shook a fat finger at him with a slightly heavy archness, and made her way all the more determinedly to the door.

He heard it close behind her. An almost imperceptible shrug was the only sign that escaped him, but the sign was not lost upon Norah. "Poor Rex," she said. "You must remember mamma has known Mrs. West for a long time."

"It's very kind of her, of course," Pender sighed resignedly.

"But you'd rather she didn't interfere? Is that it? I'm afraid nothing will ever prevent mamma from interfering. It's her nature to do so. The only thing to be said for it is that one gets used to it in time."

Pender, perhaps, had not yet had sufficient time, for he made no reply, and after a slight pause Norah said again, "Poor Rex."

He coloured faintly. The repetition jarred upon him. "Mrs. West is perfectly able to look after things, and I'm perfectly able myself to tell her what I want," he said.

At this Norah coloured in her turn, and Pender, a little ashamed of his irritability, got up and walked over to the sideboard. He lifted, one after the other, the two books she had placed there on first coming in.

"They're for you," Norah told him.

"For me?"

"Yes. One's almost afraid to choose a book for

you, but mamma seemed to think I couldn't go far wrong with Locke and James Lane Allen."

"No," Pender answered. "It was very good of you."

"Not that I care much for James Lane Allen myself," Norah confessed. "I know he writes beautiful English and all that, but I'd rather have something with more story in it. I dare say you think me a Philistine."

"Not at all," said Pender.

He was conscious of the inanity of the remark, but Norah's own had been equally inane, and he wondered, with half-ironic, half-rueful curiosity, if their conversation had ever in the past proceeded on this level of polite idiocy. The prospect of the arrival of further books, however, written possibly in still more beautiful English, urged him to mention that he found it difficult to read anything at present.

"As you see," he said, "I amuse myself by cutting out pictures. . . . The fact is I'm still as weak as a cat, and I don't suppose I shall be anything else so long as I'm shut up here."

"But what do you want to do? You can hardly go out in the pouring rain."

"I want to explore the house. I want to choose a room for myself and get it fixed up properly. I haven't even unpacked yet."

He returned to his chair, and Norah gazed at him for a moment in silence.

"Won't you use the library?" she suggested. "Then you'd have your books all round you."

"The library!" Pender marvelled. "Have you ever been *in* the library? It's the most dismal spot in the house. I did my lessons there in the old days, but I can't imagine anybody wanting to sit there. Even *this* room would be better than the library."

"You can hardly turn the dining-room into a study," said Norah, practically. "And there *are* only two other sitting-rooms—the drawing-room and the morning-room. Of course, you could take one of the bedrooms, I suppose."

"There's a room behind this," Pender said; "at the end of the passage. It used to be kept locked up, but I often peeped in through the windows."

"Oh, you can't use *that* room. It's damp. It has never been used."

"I don't see why it should be damp: it faces south, and gets all the sun."

"But it's in the old part of the house. You even go down steps to get to it, so that it must be on a lower level than the rest. I'm sure it's damp, or why shouldn't Uncle Henry have used it?"

"I don't know; but at any rate I intend to have a look at it. We might go and have a look now."

He rose impulsively, but Norah, less excitable, remained where she was. "My dear Rex," she smiled, "didn't Dr. Olphert tell you you weren't to go rushing about the house, catching cold?"

Pender hesitated. "Do you think I'm as bad as all that?"

But he sat down again; and then once more rose, restlessly, and stood leaning against the chimney-piece, with his hands in the pockets of his dressing-gown. He found himself watching Norah half furtively, almost as if she were a stranger. How many months was it since he had last been alone with her? Twelve—fourteen, perhaps. But some of them had been months that counted as years. And he remembered what he had said to Olphert about travelling back. It was true. He *had* travelled back—or onward. He had a feeling that his whole relation to Norah had changed; he knew he was looking at her now with changed eyes. Would she see it? Would she like him less if she did—be disappointed? Could they begin all over again? Ah, surely, yes. For he wanted very much not to be lonely; he had been lonely too long; he wanted quietness and peace and the intimacy of shared thoughts, shared sympathies. *Beauté de femmes, leur faiblesse, et ces mains pâles. . . .* A beauty of voice, rather. . . . And love—that, too, quiet—a

kind of white purity, such as follows on the spent wave of passion. . . .

"Rex, do you know you have been staring at me for at least five minutes without saying a word?"

He started. "I'm sorry—I'm sorry." He drew his hand quickly across his forehead and smiled. "But you know I haven't seen you for a long time. . . . And—I always liked looking at you—I always did look at you."

It was true. But he had looked differently before. At present he seemed to look from a distance wide as from one world to another. Her world had gone from him, with its freshness, its joy, its health. The wind and the sea, he thought, had moulded her, giving to her strength, and grace, and beauty. She had everything that he had not, that he had never had, or else had lost. What right had he to draw her across the threshold of his shadowy dwelling-place?

And was not this strange, perhaps slightly morbid compunction, in itself proof of his altered spirit? "I wish there were not so much difference between us," he said aloud. "You make me feel horribly worn and brittle, like one of those old thin shells one finds buried in the dry sand, out of the sea's reach."

"But, my dear Rex, influenza leaves everybody feeling worn and brittle and like an old thin shell. In a month or two, when you are playing three or four rounds a day, you will be a different person."

"Three or four rounds?" he repeated a little blankly.

Norah had a moment's pause, and then she laughed. "Do you know, that's rather funny. I don't believe I ever asked you if you play golf. We were never near any links, were we? And I suppose one rather takes it for granted; I'm sure I don't know why."

"But you mustn't take anything for granted," he told her gently. "You will be disappointed. It will be for me a repetition of 'I don't—I don't—I don't' to all your suppositions, so far as that kind of thing

is concerned. Surely you know that: you know how I was brought up, the sort of life I had. My playing-fields were not in the least the kind on which Waterloos are won. They were mostly second-hand book-shops —when I had any money to spend, which wasn't often —or the reading-rooms of Free Libraries. My only sport was making collections, and even those had to be of things other people didn't want—woodcuts of the 'sixties—foxed old books, odd volumes, which had strayed from 'sets' and were therefore cheap. And now you see me to-day, not very much improved."

It struck him that he hardly ever *had* spoken to her of himself, and he might have plunged into further autobiography had her faint amusement disclosed any hint of sympathy. But he had a feeling that she would regard such returns to the past as the burrs clinging to the garment of his illness, as, at best, sentimentalities: he had a feeling that his childhood, his boyhood, his youth, would not interest her much more than his collections. And it seemed to follow from this that he himself could never particularly interest her, since the youngster he might have chattered about was so much more really himself than the person she had known—the admirer, the lover, the companion, who had made Italy less tedious than it might otherwise have proved, who knew more about Italian art, Italian history, than the little guide-books, and was at infinitely greater pains to be picturesque and amusing. He wondered if he could resurrect that more usual, more important person for her—a schoolmaster of culture, a superior person quite frankly, later on a soldier of sorts. Quite incredibly, she had seemed to like him, though what she had discovered in him Pender was at a loss to imagine. Rather priggish, he himself thought that eager lover now; nevertheless, quite conceivably more attractive than a slippered and dressing-gowned figure, cutting out pictures, and trailing tattered clouds of glory ridiculously unsuitable to middle age.

"Dear Norah," he whispered sadly, "I wish we could be friends."

For an instant, he imagined, a startled look came into her eyes, but it was gone so quickly as to leave him in uncertainty.

"And aren't we friends?" she laughed. "I thought we were, but perhaps I don't know what you mean."

"I don't think I know myself," he sighed. "I expect I only mean that I wish I was different—more what you would like me to be."

"And what is that?"

"You know better than I do. Somebody who plays golf, I suppose—who at any rate tries to."

"Well, if that is all, there is an easy remedy."

"Is it all?" he asked half wistfully.

"I can't say, I'm sure. . . . But I can say this," she added, with a renewed gaiety, "that I don't in the least believe you want to be anything except yourself. We're not made that way."

"You don't know how I'm made," said Pender gravely.

"I know how we're *all* made—in that respect. The farthest we ever go is to wish we had a few extra ornaments woven into the original pattern."

"But if we feel the pattern has begun to be slightly unravelled?"

"We don't. When that happens we know nothing about it."

Yet, as she spoke, he had a curious sense that she was watching him critically, and that her criticism was tempered by indulgence rather than by any more flattering feeling. "You want me to play golf?" he asked. "You think I ought to?"

"I don't want you to do anything except please yourself."

"And you *do* feel all this to be horribly footling?" He waved his hand with a gesture of deprecation at the scattered heaps of papers.

She laughed once more. "Why speak of it so

tragically? You're not going to spend the rest of your life cutting out scraps, I hope."

"Yes, that's just it," he responded gloomily. "I shall probably spend it in doing things that will seem to you equally unimportant."

"Quite probably. But then I have no illusions as to the importance of the things people do. I don't think golf important. I don't even think life itself particularly important, except to the individual."

Pender looked at her. "You know, you have begun to alarm me," he said. "You never used to have a philosophy."

"And does it strike you that I have one now?"

"It sounds very like it."

"Why aren't you glad, then? You once, in the old days, tried to persuade me to read William James."

"I'm afraid that is true," he answered after a moment. "It seems to me now that in the old days I was capable of anything. But what is alarming is that your philosophy doesn't sound as if you had got it from reading."

"From what, then? I'm sure I'm not clever enough to invent it."

"One doesn't invent it: it comes. It comes out of what one has done, what one is prepared to do. It is always later than the will, the desire; usually than the action."

At this she showed, for the first time, a slight movement of impatience. "I'm afraid you're too deep for me, Rex. I don't even know what you're talking about." But she recovered immediately her half-bantering tone as she added, "It's not fair, either, to argue with your back to the chimney-piece. It gives you an advantage. Men always do stand up when they think they've something particularly profound to say. They seem to imagine it adds to the solemnity of the 'message.' Even poor papa now and then can't resist the hearthrug. It's extraordinary. And

we're all supposed, aren't we, to sit round like lambs and listen ? "

" That's more unfair than anything *I* have said or done," Pender answered. " You know I'm not a hearth-rug orator, and that I simply got up to stretch my legs."

He returned, nevertheless, to his chair, and at the same moment Cousin Nellie reappeared, heralded by a good deal of preliminary noise, the precise significance of which did not dawn upon him. She entered the room, beaming all over with an air of kittenish playfulness. She had caught Pender on the point of re-seating himself, so that her tact in rattling the door-handle had not been wasted. She eyed him with motherly favour, and something in her glance told him that she pictured him as having risen hurriedly from a kneeling position by her daughter's chair.

" Well, Mrs. West and I have had *our* chat," she said vivaciously, " and I suppose you and Norah have had yours. You're looking a good deal more lively than when we came in, Rex. I think we *have* cheered you up a little."

Pender's present air of liveliness was largely the result of an urgent desire to know what Cousin Nellie had been " up to " during her absence from the room, but his doubts were quickly set at rest, for she herself told him. A searching cross-examination of Mrs. West had been followed by numerous suggestions for the promotion of his comfort : she flattered herself that, on this score at least, he would find little to complain of in the future.

" But I hope you didn't say I *had* been complaining ? " Pender questioned anxiously. " I *haven't*, you know. I have been perfectly comfortable."

Cousin Nellie merely smiled. Ignoring Pender's interruption, she addressed him in her softest and suavest tones.

" Dr. Olphert, I suppose, still comes every day to see you ? "

"Yes. He has no fixed time, though; he rather likes to come when his other work is done."

Cousin Nellie appeared to ponder this, as if it might have some important significance: and having pondered the expression on her face grew suddenly graver. "Are you quite sure, Rex, that you are *satisfied* with Dr. Olphert? We were just wondering if you were. You see——"

Pender stared at her—a little suspiciously. "Do you mean you *aren't* satisfied with him?" he asked.

Cousin Nellie looked down. "It is only that so many people say they have not much faith in him," she murmured vaguely.

"Oh . . .?" Pender turned to Norah, and then back again to Mrs. Burton. "I haven't, you see, talked to anybody yet *except* Dr. Olphert—and Mrs. West."

Cousin Nellie perfectly understood. "Of course I don't want to influence you, Rex. Naturally, I would much rather not mention the matter at all. But since you have *asked* me. . . . Well, we don't employ Dr. Olphert ourselves; we think old Dr. Shaw is—safer perhaps—and—— However, I dare say people are a little prejudiced."

"Prejudiced? Against Olphert, do you mean? But why?"

He saw Norah make a sign to her mother, but Mrs. Burton ignored it. She looked at Pender meaningly. "After all, there are reasons—— There's no smoke without fire, is there? . . . And then . . . everybody naturally thought he should have joined the army. He's really, you know—a Sinn Feiner."

Pender listened to these charges with an air of indifference which may have been a little disappointing. He did not even question them. "Is that all?" he said. "I confess I don't quite see how his joining or not joining the army, or even his being a Sinn Feiner, can affect his ability as a doctor. I'm not such an

ardent politician myself that he's likely to try to poison me."

"Don't you think he should have joined up, then? He was perfectly free."

Pender shrugged his shoulders. "I know nothing about it. I suppose he understands his own business best. Certainly he doesn't strike me as the type of man to do things merely because other people think he ought to do them."

"No, he isn't at all that type."

Mrs. Burton's voice was quiet, and it was still quieter when she added, "If a person refuses to make the slightest self-sacrifice, and is content that everything that has to be done shall be done by others, don't you think he must at least be prepared to take the consequences? I mean, that under those circumstances he can hardly complain if his conduct is criticised."

Pender broke into a sudden laugh. "*Has* Olphert complained?" he asked. "I shouldn't have thought he would have cared a fig about either the consequences *or* the criticism." Then he added, with possibly a shade too much emphasis, "I like him, you know. I liked him very much when he was a boy, and I like him still."

A silence followed these words—a silence obviously, on Cousin Nellie's part, of disapproval. It was Norah who hastily changed the subject. "Do you play chess, Rex? I was nearly forgetting papa's message. He told me to be sure to ask you."

"I'm afraid I don't," Pender replied.

"Then, would it bore you very much to learn? Papa is dying to teach you, but if you don't want to be taught I'll break it to him nicely."

"Of course I'll be delighted," Pender declared. "It's very good of him."

"Are you sure? You always did say, you know, that you were delighted with things you secretly detested."

"Why should he detest it?" her mother demanded coldly.

"Why, indeed?" Pender echoed. "And if I do I can give it up. You'd better warn him, however, that I've never played in my life, and that he'll have to bring the chess-board and the men with him."

"There is a chess-table in the drawing-room," Mrs. Burton mentioned, though in tones that still harked back to the affair of Dr. Olphert. "Uncle Henry used to play occasionally with Theodore."

"I'll come to see you to-morrow, then," Norah promised, "and perhaps I'll bring papa with me."

Her mother had risen, and she, too, now rose to say good-bye. For a moment she held his hand and looked straight into his eyes.

He heard the outer door closing behind them, but he did not return to his magazines—he sat thinking. . . . The visit had struck a sharp blow at his optimism. Even when Norah's hand had rested in his, returning its pressure with the warm, firm grasp of youth and strength and good-will—more even then, perhaps, than at any other moment—he had felt that she was spiritually nearly as far away from him as Cousin Nellie herself. All the intimacy of the past seemed to have faded out with the waning of the attraction that at first had bound him. It had been, then, so poor a thing as that. Yet Norah certainly was not to blame. If she had shown any disagreeable and hitherto unsuspected qualities, he could positively have welcomed them, as explaining, to some extent at least, his present state of mind, but she had shown nothing, he felt sure, that had not been there from the beginning. It was only that they seemed now to talk to each other across a gulf. He had advanced to the gulf's edge, seeking a bridge, but a kind of mist, icy and impalpable, had floated up from its depths and driven him back. He did not even know what it was. It seemed to him that she, too, must feel it, yet he was not sure. That

was indeed a part of it. He was not particularly sure that she felt anything, ever had felt anything. If she had, she must feel now, she must know. Yet she acted as if she did not feel, did not know. She struck him, somehow, as being remote and passionless as Diana wandering upon the cold moonlit mountain side, and he remembered that he had never at any time seen her irritated, or put out, or very strongly moved in any direction. There was something in that unruffled placidity—an element of strength, or, possibly, of insensitiveness—against which he felt himself powerless. It dismayed him : it seemed to take so for granted the continuance of an affection she apparently did not expect nor even wish to be any more demonstrative than it had been to-day. He had a feeling that she trusted him absolutely. She did not know him, of course, but she would probably never quite realise nor worry about that. She might worry if he behaved badly, but all that was merely incomprehensible she would ignore. And he had an instinctive conviction that her trust was well-founded, that he never *would* behave badly—not, that is to say, in the Burtons' sense of the word.

PART III

MRS. BURTON AT HOME

It was a cold, wet Saturday afternoon, and Mrs. Burton was alone. She had wrapped herself in a large white fleecy shawl, and, under the impression that the Canon was in his study working at a sermon, under the impression that the others were out, she looked forward to an hour or two of undisturbed reading. By her side was a *Life of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, but Mrs. Burton was absorbed in another book, which she had brought down from her bedroom, where it had been kept under lock and key. She pulled her shawl closer about her, and turned the pages with the rapidity of the curious rather than appreciative reader. Suddenly the door opened and Norah entered.

Mrs. Burton started guiltily. Her immediate impulse was to conceal her book, but she had no time to do more than close it and put her hand over the title. "I thought you had gone for a walk," she exclaimed with repressed peevishness. "You said at lunch you were going. What have you been doing?"

"I've been washing my hair," replied Norah innocently. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing's the matter. Only please either come in or go out: don't stand there with the door wide open: you know I hate draughts."

Norah seemed puzzled by the apparent inopportuneness of her entrance, but she closed the door. "You look frozen," she said, walking over in her mother's direction. "Why don't you have a fire?"

Mrs. Burton tucked her book farther out of sight. "I don't approve of fires in summer," she answered snappishly. "It sets the servants a bad example." She waited, with an expression of stoicism, for her daughter to take her departure, but Norah, standing aimlessly on the hearthrug, seemed in no hurry to do so.

"I don't think you need make yourself uncomfortable for the sake of the servants. It's not as if it had the remotest effect upon them. There's a roaring fire in the kitchen at this moment."

"I dare say."

Suddenly the girl caught a glimpse of the compromising volume. In an attempt to pull her shawl over it Mrs. Burton had exposed the title, though only for an instant. "*The Portrait of the*——," Norah read aloud mechanically. But next moment she had grasped the whole thing. "Mother!" she exclaimed. "You're not reading that awful book!"

Mrs. Burton flushed. She would have liked to box Norah's ears, or send her to bed—those ancient safety-valves for maternal embarrassment—but unfortunately she had to adopt a quite different tone. "I'm *not* reading it," she said. "I merely took it up to glance through it."

"Ethel Richardson told me it was the worst book she had ever seen—perfectly dreadful!" Norah went on in shocked tones that ignored her mother's explanation. "Colonel Richardson got it somewhere, but he kept it locked up."

Mrs. Burton made no answer.

"Where did you get it?" the girl persisted curiously. "Did you *buy* it?"

Mrs. Burton forced back the reply she would have liked to make. "Mrs. Richardson lent it to me," she answered coldly. "And at any rate I wished to see it. One has to know something about a book before one can condemn it."

"But why do you want to condemn it?" Norah asked. "And Ethel *told* me her father kept it locked up."

"That doesn't appear to have prevented Ethel herself from reading it," retorted Mrs. Burton, with sudden waspishness, "or from talking about it to you. I don't know what girls are coming to. You, certainly, are *not* going to read it."

"I don't think I want to if it's really horrid," answered Norah sweetly.

"There's a very great difference between my just glancing at it, and Ethel Richardson's *poring* over it," her mother continued.

"How do you know Ethel 'pored'? I expect she only glanced at it, too." Norah walked to the window, where she stood contemplating the weather with a faint and intensely provoking smile.

"I think, you know, it's rather mean of you and Mrs. Richardson," she went on after a moment. "It doesn't seem fair to enjoy the book first and then abuse it. I can understand your doing either one thing or the other, but certainly not both."

Cousin Nellie gathered all her dignity about her; she felt, indeed, that this was what she should have done from the beginning, instead of embarking on humiliating explanations. "Mrs. Richardson *didn't* enjoy it," she returned freezingly. "And I intend to give it back to her at the first opportunity. Is that sufficient?"

Norah remained silent. As she stood there, however, serenely gazing out, still with that equivocal smile upon her face, her silence merely suggested cynical amusement, and there was something about her—about her whole manner—far from reassuring to a mother's heart. She outraged several of Mrs. Burton's tenderest ideals. She was not at all what a young girl ought to be; not in the least what she, Cousin Nellie, had been at her age. She seemed to have developed qualities within the last year or two which she had certainly not possessed in childhood, or which, if she *had* possessed them, she had at least kept decently hidden. "I believe it's going to clear up after all," the girl announced, but Cousin Nellie was too absorbed

in the gloomy problem of her daughter's personality to be interested in weather. At last she spoke, spoke in subdued but sombre tones,—

"If you're going out, you might take Wopsey with you. He was in the house all day yesterday, and a run will do him good."

"He won't follow me," Norah objected at once.

"He'll follow you if you take him on the leash."

"He'd much rather stay here with you. Besides, if I go out, it will be to get some exercise, and to keep myself warm."

Wopsey, curled up on a cushion, in delicate drowsiness, had opened one sharp little eye when his name was mentioned, but at the sight of Norah he closed it again with a faint shudder.

"How can you be so selfish?" asked Mrs. Burton plaintively.

"I'm not selfish. Only, I don't enjoy dawdling along on a day like this, dragging Wopsey after me on a leash. . . . Anyway," she triumphantly added, "there's Tonie Ronayne and her bulldogs. Wopsey can't possibly go out now; he'd have a fit."

"You can wait till they're gone," said her mother.

"We'd be sure to meet them coming back, and Tonie lets the dogs do exactly what they like."

Mrs. Burton sighed and gave it up. Norah's good-tempered obduracy was too much for her. At all events, she felt incapable of coping with it now.

"Here's Mrs. O'Clery coming to see you," the girl called out. "I think I'd better vanish while there's time."

She hastened from the room as her mother helplessly exclaimed, "What does she want?" and next moment a double rat-tat-tat sounded from the street. "Tell Jane to bring in tea," Mrs. Burton screamed through a slamming door; then hurriedly prepared to receive the visitor.

She this time really did hide the incriminating novel, and opened her *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*. Cousin Nellie was supposed rather to specialise in biography. Lives

of great men all reminded her she could make her life sublime. She enjoyed, at any rate, browsing among the foolish little anecdotes that accumulate around celebrities.

From sundry noises in the hall she knew the visitor was being relieved of a dripping waterproof and umbrella, and instantly she suspected that if Mrs. O'Clery had come out on a day like this it must be because she wanted something. This suspicion was quite sufficient to awaken uneasiness and even hostility in Cousin Nellie. If it was a subscription, she simply wasn't going to give one. With astonishing rapidity she invented a number of excuses for not doing *any*thing Mrs. O'Clery might have come to suggest. Nevertheless, before Jane had time to, she opened the drawing-room door, her face wreathed in smiles. "My *dear*, aren't you dreadfully wet? I'm so glad you had the courage——"

"I had to go as far as the post office, anyway," Mrs. O'Clery explained unsentimentally, and with a swift glance at the palm in the empty grate.

She made her way into the room and sat down opposite Mrs. Burton. She was an elderly lady, thin and erect, with a high colour, a beaky nose, bright dark eyes, and a determined mouth. In comparison with Cousin Nellie she looked markedly distinguished. Her voice was clear, loud, and metallic in quality—a voice with no soft notes in it—a voice to be identified from afar.

"How is Mr. Pender?" she asked, with a second glance at the empty grate.

Mrs. Burton fluttered. Looking in her large white shawl rather like some new species of plump aquatic fowl, she replied enthusiastically, "He's a *great* deal better, thanks. In fact quite convalescent now. Theodore and Norah were at Ramoan this morning."

Mrs. O'Clery shivered. The ornamental palm displeased her. "I suppose there is no risk of infection, then?" she said.

Mrs. Burton hastened to explain.

"Well, of course, in such a case (Rex, poor fellow, is practically all alone, you know), one does not consider risks so much."

"I gathered from Dr. Olphert that you *had* considered them," returned Mrs. O'Clery frankly. "He told me Mr. Pender had been nursed by Mrs. West."

Mrs. Burton was obliged to explain still further. "Of course, we didn't actually *go* to the house, while there was any infection—just at the beginning, I mean —when Rex was in bed, and when it would have been quite useless. . . . After all, one must consider the children."

"Naturally. And one must consider oneself, too, I should say."

Mrs. Burton sighed. "Oh, if it had only been *myself*. . . ."

"I see. It's fortunate you had the others then. Influenza is much too dangerous a thing to play tricks with."

Jane, by this time, had brought in tea, and Mrs. O'Clery drank a cup (rather rapidly, Cousin Nellie thought) before she continued,—

"I'm glad Mr. Pender called in Dr. Olphert. He has been successful with all his cases."

"Even the *best* doctors know so little about influenza, don't they?" Cousin Nellie murmured vaguely. "I mean—it seems to be so much more a matter of chance than anything else."

The visitor smiled—a play of feature which in her case, so far from softening, rather added to the grimness of her appearance. "Well, I call that distinctly ungrateful. When a man has just pulled his patient through——"

"Of course, I didn't mean it in that way," Mrs. Burton hastened to add. "I know Dr. Olphert was most attentive. . . . But Rex deserved it, don't you think? Those who have suffered for their country what *he* has suffered, deserve all and more than all we

can do for them. Dr. Olphert, I am sure, was delighted to be able to help a little—in *this* way at least. . . . Won't you have some more tea ? "

Mrs. O'Clery's laugh was disillusioned and uninfectious : it resembled, in fact, a sort of derisive battle-cry. " Well, perhaps I *will* have another cup, thanks. It may warm me a little."

Mrs. Burton apologised. " I'm sorry there's no fire, but I never have fires after the first of May. I consider that it sets a bad example to the servants."

Mrs. O'Clery laughed again : she was, Cousin Nellie perceived, in one of her more trying moods. " My dear woman, you put us all to shame. . . . ! We're not nearly hardy enough nowadays. I had no idea your room was so splendidly airy. . . . ! In weather like this it's positively bracing. . . . Have you heard that Miss Foy is talking of giving up her house ? "

Mrs. Burton replaced the cosy on the teapot. " No," she replied crossly. Then she added, " I can't say I'm surprised. She would have been much wiser to have given it up long ago."

The visitor cocked a bright but incredulous eye at her. " D'you think so ? I'm afraid I don't at all agree. Rooms have never been cheap in Ballycastle, and just at present they're remarkably dear. . . . We were wondering if nothing could be done ? "

Mrs. Burton made no answer, but an expression of gloom gradually overspread her countenance as she stared fixedly at a plate of bread-and-butter. Beg—beg—beg !—did they ever do anything else from morning till night ? And Mrs. O'Clery, having plenty of money, was naturally one of the worst. Mrs. O'Clery liked to share her philanthropy : it made it inexpensive. Everybody knew, Mrs. Burton pondered bitterly, that she and the Canon had not more than enough to live comfortably on themselves. Indeed, if it had not been for her private means they would not even have had that. Everybody knew, moreover, what her views on the question of charities were. They

were practically the same as Bernard Shaw's, except that she wasn't a socialist. But still they kept on begging. It was as if they took a base delight in trying to make her feel mean.

"I don't see what we *can* do," she said at last. "I mean, more than we actually do already. As it is, I send Adeline to her for music, though I know she isn't a competent teacher."

"She is at any rate the only one," returned Mrs. O'Clery promptly. "And her fees aren't high."

Mrs. Burton resented the implication. "If anybody comes to her assistance, I think it ought to be her own sister. I don't see why *we* should take it upon ourselves to interfere."

"Mrs. Vansittart?"

"Yes, she's quite well off."

"Is she?" Mrs. O'Clery's voice again sounded a sceptical note. "I know nothing about her circumstances, except that she lives in New York, which is very far away from Ballycastle. At all events Miss Foy is the last creature in the world to ask her to do anything. She probably writes as if she were rolling in affluence."

"Well, then, that's her own look-out," Mrs. Burton could not help retorting. "If she won't accept help from her sister I don't see how she can accept it from strangers. In fact, I think it would be a great mistake in tact even to propose such a thing. She is very sensitive, and one must respect that."

Mrs. O'Clery's sharp eye was fixed upon her while she brought out this ingenious argument, but rather to Cousin Nellie's surprise she did not say anything nasty at the end of it. On the contrary, she seemed almost to agree.

"That really *is* the difficulty," she admitted, after screwing up her mouth for a moment. "However, the whole idea was Tonie Ronayne's, not mine, and I dare say she'll be able to find a way out—she usually can."

To Mrs. Burton's relief she dropped the subject there —though doubtless with the intention of returning to it as soon as she got hold of the Canon by himself. "I had a letter from George Best this morning," she went on. "I half expected him down here this month, but he doesn't know whether he will be able to manage it."

"What is he doing now?" Mrs. Burton asked. Her countenance had cleared a little, and she even permitted herself a tiny burst of sentiment. "I think it is so wonderful the way they come back!—just as if nothing had happened!"

"Well, I'm glad George *did* come back," returned Mrs. O'Clery dryly. "In his case, however, I'm afraid it's not as if nothing had happened. . . . He says he's looking after a post, but he seems very doubtful as to whether he'll get it or not, and he doesn't even mention what it is. He's determined to give up reading for the bar at all events. He says he's sick of it, and that there's nothing in it—for him at least. No doubt it *is* very slow. On the other hand, he doesn't want to stay in the army, and I can't see what else there is, unless he goes abroad—to the colonies or somewhere. . . . We're just talking about my nephew, George Best," she called out to Canon Burton, who at that moment, in his oldest and shabbiest clothes, made a rather hesitating appearance in the doorway.

The Canon advanced and shook hands with Mrs. O'Clery. His manner betrayed mingled elements of joy and timidity, though joy on the whole predominated. "I hope he will be able to spare us a few weeks this summer" he murmured, while his eyes, wandering past the visitor, fastened on a spot somewhere beyond her. "Let me see. It must be nearly two years since he was with you last. I remember——"

"Well, not quite so much as that. About a year, I should say. . . . The war seems to have unsettled him dreadfully."

The Canon softly smiled. "It has unsettled all of

us, I'm afraid." His smile faded. "And there are so many who will never return; while we old and useless people are left hanging on. . . . But perhaps. . . . *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.*"

He fell into a reverie from which he was somewhat brusquely awakened by Mrs. Burton pushing a cup of tea at him. "If it's stone cold, Theodore, it isn't my fault. I thought you weren't coming. Didn't Jane tell you?"

"I've no doubt she did, my dear," replied the Canon mildly. Then, becoming conscious of the repressed irritation in his wife's manner, he hastily added, "I was finishing my sermon. It doesn't matter. Half a cup is all I want."

Mrs. O'Clery watched him with disapproval, even with a veiled contempt, as he raised the teacup to his lips. Yet she liked Canon Burton; nearly everybody liked him; he was so miraculously discreet. He was really a part of the church, as much a part of it as its bell or its steeple. His cultured, pleasant voice, his friendly smile, the meandering flow of his conversation —all seemed to have been formed by immemorial ecclesiastic tradition. His pale, lacklustre eyes just brushed the visitor for a moment as he said, "What inclement weather we are having, Mrs. O'Clery. One would think it must soon improve."

"I have given up taking the slightest interest in the weather," Mrs. O'Clery replied. "It only makes it worse. I accept what is sent as the gift of heaven—and when it is cold light a fire. . . . Which reminds me there was something I wanted to talk to you about, though what it is I can't for the life of me remember."

"That is a failing I can sympathise with," the Canon began, "I am myself so forgetful that sometimes——"

"I remember now," interrupted Mrs. O'Clery. "I must be adding stupidity to the other infirmities of old age. I saw Professor Heron yesterday, and he told me he was thinking of getting Trefusis's poems published."

The Canon showed the liveliest interest. "It's very odd," he said, "but precisely the same idea had occurred to me." He turned to Mrs. Burton for confirmation. "I mentioned it to you, Nellie, didn't I, when Professor Heron lent us the manuscript? We were so pleased with the poems that we felt sure there must be lots of others who would like to read them. We don't, I sometimes fancy, nowadays read enough poetry. We fail to recognise sufficiently that it has been in the past one of the most valuable influences in life. Indeed, we should hardly be claiming too much for it, perhaps, were we to rank it in this respect next to religion. Certainly some of the greatest poetry in the world—*Paradise Lost*, for instance—has had a profoundly religious influence."

"Then I dare say you'll approve of *my* plan," interrupted Mrs. O'Clery. "I told Professor Heron the book ought to be published by subscription, and that it should have an introduction which, if he didn't write it himself, should be written by you."

Mrs. Burton checked a cynical laugh. Subscriptions again! The woman evidently had developed a mania for them.

"Trefusis will bring us all into fame," exclaimed the Canon with mild jocularity. "*Monumentum aere perennius*. I think it is a capital suggestion. What did the Professor say?"

"He didn't say much, but I could see he was pleased —which is the main thing," replied Mrs. O'Clery. "Trefusis, I suppose, really *is* a remarkable boy?"

"Undoubtedly," the Canon assured her.

"Very," murmured Mrs. Burton.

"If he wasn't such a hopeless little prig," Mrs. O'Clery unfeelingly added. "And now, naturally, he'll be worse than ever. The book should be published without his knowing anything about it, but of course that's impossible."

"I think, Theodore, you ought to write the introduction," said Mrs. Burton unexpectedly. She turned

to her visitor. "I suppose you have read the poems, Mrs. O'Clery?"

"No, I can't say I have," that lady candidly admitted. "But everybody tells me they're wonderfully good."

"Professor Heron was kind enough to lend us the manuscript," Mrs. Burton continued. "He particularly wanted to have my opinion on them. Of course, he knew I had written occasionally myself. The poems are really extraordinary. And Professor Heron has noted down the age at which each one was composed. The earliest was written when Trefusis was only eight, but even at eight he seems to have had wonderful thoughts. I don't know how to express it exactly, but the whole tone is so—so elevated."

Mrs. O'Clery received these eulogies with an encouraging smile. "Well, I've promised to look after the subscription list," she said, "but perhaps I should have left it to you. However, we must all help, if we're all to be elevated."

"But you won't make it entirely a local thing, will you?" Mrs. Burton questioned carelessly. "If a circular were sent round, I dare say there are quite a number of strangers who would like to subscribe."

"The book is to be put on sale in the ordinary way," answered Mrs. O'Clery, "and they can buy it then if they want. But so far as bringing it out is concerned, I think we can manage that among ourselves. I have only spoken to two or three people so far, but next week I intend to begin properly."

"And at what price will it be published?"

"Nothing has been settled, but I should think at about ten shillings. It will all depend, however, on how the subscriptions work out. Captain Chaffinch and Dr. Olphert have each promised to take half a dozen copies, and Tonie Ronayne says that if Trefusis will put in a poem about her bulldog Tim she'll take a dozen. Trefusis was going this morning to see Tim, to get an inspiration."

"You must put Nellie and me down for three copies each," said the Canon, and Mrs. O'Clery fumbled for her notebook.

"You've forgotten about your introduction, Theodore," Mrs. Burton smiled. "We shall hardly require twelve copies."

"Twelve?" the Canon repeated, a little blankly.

"You'll be getting, of course, six copies free," Mrs. Burton explained. "At least, that is the usual thing. Isn't it, Mrs. O'Clery?"

Mrs. O'Clery opened astonished eyes. "I'm sure I never heard of such a thing in my life," she declared with perfect truthfulness. "Of course, it's nothing to me how many free copies you get, but, as president of the Literary Society, I should have thought you'd want to help in the matter. Professor Heron isn't particularly well off."

"That is exactly why I suggested sending out a prospectus," Mrs. Burton replied.

"To be sure, to be sure," the Canon hurriedly interposed. "We *do* want to help. It would never do to leave the whole thing to the Professor. Trefusis is our local genius, and as such we all claim a share in him. Nellie was only joking. One of the poems, if I remember rightly, is even addressed to her."

But that Nellie had not in the least been joking he was fated to learn directly Mrs. O'Clery had gone. Mrs. Burton harped on the subject for twenty minutes, while the Canon took refuge in the last number of *Punch*. She produced reason after reason why they need only subscribe for two copies, why they need only subscribe for one, why, the Canon being part author, they need not subscribe at all. Among the more remarkable of these arguments was her conviction that Rex Pender would subscribe.

"But what has that to do with us, my love?" the Canon asked in some astonishment.

Mrs. Burton gave him a pitying smile. "Considering that Rex is my cousin, and that he is engaged to *Norah*,

he can hardly be said to have nothing to do with us!"

The incontrovertible nature of this statement reduced her husband to silence, but Mrs. Burton did not follow up her victory. Instead, she abruptly changed the subject by announcing that George Best would probably be coming to stay with Mrs. O'Clery before the end of the summer.

The Canon, having already heard this from Mrs. O'Clery herself, murmured only a brief acquiescence, while he continued to chuckle over his paper.

Mrs. Burton had not expected more. She was long-suffering. Theodore usually required a good deal of stirring up before he could be aroused from his rather trying habit of merely listening to her.

"I suppose it doesn't matter," she said pregnantly.

The Canon now looked up. Something in her tone warned him that he was expected to contribute at least an intelligent question. He fixed his eyes on her with a rather frog-like expression. "What doesn't matter?" he asked, striving to appear more perspicacious then he actually felt.

"About George Best—about his coming here," said Mrs. Burton.

She was guilty immediately afterwards of a slightly impatient movement, and it must be confessed her husband's countenance presented at that moment a picture of unfathomable blankness. What *was* the use of talking to him, even about his own children? He never understood, and any explanation he got only seemed to leave him still further in the dark.

"I intend to be quite nice to him," she went on, very deliberately. "Really quite nice."

The Canon still gazed at her, with an extraordinary effect of amiable idiocy. Then he made a frantic effort to rise to her level. "You mean, you weren't nice to him before?" he asked.

"I mean nothing of the sort," snapped Mrs. Burton angrily. "I'm not in the habit of being nasty to

people. And I wish you would put down your paper when I talk to you."

The Canon apologised, as he hastily obeyed. But he felt discouraged; he risked no further remarks.

"A man never understands," Mrs. Burton continued, after remaining for some time absorbed in her own thoughts. "I *had* to put Norah's happiness first—or what I believed to be her happiness."

"You never told me exactly what you *did* do, you know," said the Canon feebly.

"I told you all there was to be told. That he was paying attention to Norah, and that it must be stopped."

"Yes—but wasn't it stopped? And Norah didn't care for him, did she—in that way?"

"I never know *what* Norah cares for," Mrs. Burton brought out, with an unexpected quaver in her voice. "I don't think she cares for anything but herself. . . . She certainly encouraged him."

The Canon, even through his alarm, brightened a little. He recognised an appeal—an appeal to his masculine strength, which he at once responded to. "It's all over now, isn't it?" he said cheerfully, patting his wife's hand, which he had taken. "I don't see why you need worry."

"I hope it *is* all over. . . . She couldn't be so foolish, so—so wicked," Mrs. Burton added almost tearfully. "But I may as well tell you that at one time she wanted to break off her engagement to Rex."

This was genuinely startling; so startling that the Canon forgot even to wonder why he was hearing of it now for the first time. He relinquished the hand he held. "But—does Rex know?" he questioned uneasily.

"Know!" Mrs. Burton stared. "Of course he doesn't know. Why should *his* peace of mind be troubled, poor fellow? It's bad enough for us to know, without worrying *him*."

The Canon looked slightly scandalised. He repressed, however, his first impulse, which was to comment

upon the curious morality of this point of view. Instead, he simply accepted it—accepted it as being, like a considerable proportion of his wife's ethics, in some mysterious way beyond and above his grosser comprehension. "It is only—— It seems, perhaps, hardly fair," he murmured timidly.

"What nonsense!"—Mrs. Burton had a flash of returning impatience. "And since it *wasn't* broken off, what was there to tell?" She gave the Canon a glance which warned him that *he*, at least, had better not interfere. "All the same," she went on, allowing her despondency once more to gain the upper hand, "I wish Mrs. O'Clery hadn't asked him—not at present, at any rate."

"Perhaps he won't come," the Canon suggested consolingly. "Mrs. O'Clery herself seemed to think it very doubtful."

"And perhaps he will."

With this unanswerable retort she left him. But at the door she paused, and even came back a step or two. "I don't think I shall tell Norah anything about it. And don't *you* tell her," she added. "He may not come, as you say, though I'm perfectly sure he will: they always do—when they're not wanted. . . . But even if he does, it may not be for a considerable time yet—not till the autumn, perhaps. I dare say if I wrote, *telling* him of Norah's engagement—telling him, I mean, that it's all on again——" She allowed this remarkable sentence to die away uncompleted. The Canon, gazing at her in mute inquiry, saw she was once more lost in thought. And indeed she moved slowly from the room without adding another word, leaving him to turn the matter over for himself, and extract from it what feeble light he could.

PART IV

THE SEARCH

I

For many days Pender had found plenty to do, prowling about the house and garden, arranging things, arranging in particular that room which he intended to be his principal living room. He had employed carpenters, he had done a good deal of work himself, his books were on the shelves, many other books had been brought from the library, and now all was finished. He had chosen this room because of its position (one could pass in and out without going through the house); also he liked its odd shape, which resembled that of a capital L. As in the dining-room, the walls and ceiling were panelled. On the dark, uncarpeted floor were a few rugs, and a large square writing-table stood facing the two French windows, so that by merely lifting his eyes he could look out into a green midsummer world.

There was very little furniture except the bookshelves and three or four comfortable chairs, for Pender liked plenty of space, liked to be able to walk up and down freely. During the past week he had spent a good deal of time walking up and down. He had become absorbed in the planning and shaping of a task which as yet he had mentioned to nobody. Not that he was secretive by nature; but it might so easily come to nothing. In any case, he felt, it was hardly a task to be distinguished from idleness by Norah, or the majority of his fellow-townsmen. Most of them enjoyed as much leisure as Pender himself, but a stroll

down to the bank and a chat with the manager did wonders to keep up that illusion of occupation apparently essential to their self-respect, while the intervals were filled with club meetings, golf, bridge—pursuits that somehow created an atmosphere of fuss and busyness.

Pender's work, on the contrary, demanded seclusion and quiet. He himself would not have called it work, would not have set it up in competition with the paying out of cheques, the tying up of parcels, or the composing of sermons: he would have claimed no more for it at present than the absorbing interest of an elaborate game of skill, but he *did* claim that. And he had a feeling that his claim would be denied. It was a game (a game of hide-and-seek) played under such strange conditions, not exactly in solitude, but with unseen ghostly companions, who from behind a curtain ever and anon whispered a faint and perhaps deceptive cue. The game had hardly begun; Pender, as yet, had taken only the first tentative, hesitating steps; but already he had the conviction that it was going to be by far the most enthralling he had ever embarked on.

One afternoon he had just come in from strolling up and down on the thick tangled grass before his study windows, thinking of what he had done that morning and of what he would do next, when two visitors arrived. From the window he caught sight of them as they turned the corner of the shrubbery—Canon Burton, and a drab and faded little lady who could only be Miss Foy. A minute or two later they were ushered in by Mrs. West.

Pender hastened to welcome them. He had called upon Miss Foy—thanks to Dr. Olphert's reminder—but he had not found her at home, and this was their first meeting since that remote period of his visit to his grandfather. Mrs. West, indeed, lingering by the door, appeared to be particularly interested in it, and she actually challenged Miss Foy with an embarrassing "I suppose now you would hardly have known

Master Rex? "—awaiting her reply with proprietary anxiety.

"On the contrary, I should have recognised him anywhere," Miss Foy fibbed boldly. "I knew you at once," she went on to Pender, "when I saw you driving past on the day of your arrival. I had been to the post office to purchase a stamp, and was just coming out when you and Dr. Olphert drove by." She had, it is true, lingered in the post office for nearly ten minutes, until she had heard Olphert's horn hooting at the corner of the station road, but this further information she did not impart to her listeners. Mrs. West declared that she, too, would have known him anywhere, and did not consider he had much changed at all.

"It's very nice of you both," Pender laughed, with a rapid vision of the sallow haggard face that had looked out at him from his glass that morning. "I'm not sure that it's particularly flattering to the youngster who was here before, but I suppose we needn't dwell upon that."

With a final glance of benevolent supervision Mrs. West at this point left them, and the Canon, who had held himself rather aloof from these feminine flutterings over their host, now explained how he and Miss Foy had happened to arrive together. The explanation was perhaps a little unnecessary, since Pender had not supposed their meeting to have been anything but an accident, nevertheless the Canon was at some pains to make all clear. "We must persuade Mr. Pender to take up croquet," he went on, becoming conscious of a slight stoniness in Miss Foy's expression. "It would just suit him at present; it would keep him in the open air, and would not entail the violent exercise most outdoor games do. Miss Foy and I are old enemies at croquet," he added amiably. "Which reminds me that Mrs. O'Clery asked me to play this afternoon. I promised to be back at half-past five."

"She asked me also," said Miss Foy.

"That is fortunate," the Canon declared. "If I

happen to be late now, I shall have a good excuse and somebody to keep me in countenance."

"I told her I couldn't play," said Miss Foy, with an involuntary note of satisfaction in her voice.

She gazed about her in a kind of shy curiosity. "You appear to have quite settled down, Mr. Pender," she murmured. "Though I know the house so well, I don't think I was ever in this room before. You have certainly made it very pleasant."

"It *is* rather nice, I think," Pender smiled. "You don't consider the shape a drawback, do you?"

"I wonder if it always *was* this shape?" said the Canon. "It looks to me as if there may have been two rooms here."

"You mean, a wall has perhaps been knocked down? I don't think so. The panelling, you see, is unbroken, and it seems pretty old."

"But the size? It is larger than the drawing-room."

"I have an idea, of course, that it once *was* the drawing-room," Pender said. "The present drawing-room isn't a part of the original house at all."

Miss Foy agreed. She thought it strange, too, that so fine a room should not have been used by Mr. Kilmartin. Hot and flushed on her arrival, she was beginning now to feel the soothing influence of her surroundings. The cool green light was very restful after the glare and dust of the road. Filtering between green leaves, stained by their colour, this sunlight flooding the room gave it a resemblance to a cave somewhere below the sea.

And she felt an instant sympathy with Mr. Pender. She did, really, remember him now. She felt still just a little fluttered by the adventure of her visit, which she had undertaken only after a good deal of preliminary bullying from Dr. Olphert, but she was glad she had undertaken it. She did not at present even mind the Canon's being there. He was certainly making himself agreeable, and perhaps she had been inclined to attach

overmuch importance to his attitude towards Non-conformists.

Meanwhile the Canon prattled on. He was an excellent prattler, and Pender's company exactly suited him. He liked easy-going, non-aggressive people—people with pleasant voices, a pleasant way of speaking, and a due amount of culture—and he liked to be surrounded by the outward and visible signs, if not of affluence, at least of solid comfort. He liked, too, the hour of afternoon-tea, and Mrs. West's hot tea-cakes. The only thing that faintly marred his enjoyment was a consciousness that Mrs. Burton had entrusted him with a note he must either have forgotten or lost, since he could not find it in any of his pockets.

"I see you have brought in one of the pictures from the dining-room," said Miss Foy, gazing up at the portrait of the lady in muslin.

Pender also looked up at it, and for a more protracted period than Miss Foy. The picture struck him, oddly, as watching over the scene—as being a kind of tutelary spirit, slightly mocking perhaps, and not at all in sympathy with his visitors, but amusedly benign—tolerant of them, quite willing to be nice to them. "Yes, they *both* belong to the dining-room," he said. "The drawing of the boy's head was there, too, hidden away in a dark corner where it was impossible to see it. . . . I wish you would tell me something about them."

He added these last words lightly, but none the less with a certain eagerness. "It is rather shocking to be so completely ignorant of one's own family. . . . I have asked Mrs. West, but she knows very little. . . . Most of the pictures in the dining-room *must* be family portraits, I should think. Otherwise they would hardly be there. They aren't, I mean, particularly ornamental, and as paintings they're decidedly bad."

The Canon peered short-sightedly at the two pictures. "Nellie, perhaps, would be able to tell you," he

suggested. "Is there no name on them?—possibly on the back?"

"There's nothing," said Pender, "nothing at all. But I'm sure Cousin Nellie *does* know all about them. I don't know why I never thought of asking her."

Miss Foy was a good deal less sure, though she kept her doubts to herself. "That," she said, "is Mrs. Edward Kilmartin. I can tell you so much at least. Her picture used to hang beside Edward's own portrait; above the fireplace in the dining-room."

"Yes, Edward is there still. I shall have to bring him in. . . . I was right, then. . . . I guessed this was Roxana." He looked inquiringly at Miss Foy. "I wonder how he persuaded her to marry him? . . . And the boy? Do you know who *he* is?"

Miss Foy fixed her glasses and got up to inspect the drawing. She stuck her nose very close to it, and cleared her throat twice, while the Canon, with large, solemn round eyes, and a mouth that slowly opened and shut, watched her. "No," she was obliged to confess. "Mr. Kilmartin may have told me, for he was rather proud of his pictures, but if he did, it has escaped my memory."

The Canon's mouth for some reason still continued to open and shut noiselessly, like that of a fish, while his large, round eyes wandered past Pender, who had risen, and stood leaning against the chimney-piece. Pender felt inclined to pat him on the head: he looked ridiculously like something that ought to be patted. He suddenly laughed—a little to the surprise of his companions. "I'm a good deal interested in Roxana, you know. I discovered a number of letters belonging to her in the library, all neatly tied up and arranged in a box. You don't think the young man could be Tom Firbis, do you?"

But Miss Foy, wonderfully, *did* think so. "Oh, now I remember," she cried in triumph. "I helped Mr. Kilmartin to sort those letters. . . . That boy there *is* Mr. Tom Firbis. He was half-brother to

Mr. Edward Kilmartin, and it was he who wrote the letters to Mrs. Edward—Roxana, as you call her. She was his sister-in-law: or would it constitute a relationship, when Tom was only a half-brother?"

The Canon, feeling he was being left quite too much out of things, pounced eagerly on a problem he was just as qualified to pronounce upon as anybody else. He considered it aloud, and decided there *would* be a relationship.

"Of course, in either case, there would be no real relationship," Pender objected, "no blood relationship. We might call Roxana a sister-in-law once removed, but that wouldn't in the least matter."

"What wouldn't matter?" asked Miss Foy.

"Whether she was Tom's sister-in-law or not."

"I must say I never heard anything about it," said the Canon. He paused, turning a dull, gentle eye on Pender. But suddenly his expression altered and became portentously solemn. It was as if at this point he had begun to scent a scandal. "What is the nature of these letters?" he asked, almost with severity.

"Well, that's just it," Pender answered gaily. "I don't believe Roxana showed them to her husband—to Edward."

"Oh!" The Canon's monosyllable conveyed that no further explanation was needed.

"Have *you* read them, Miss Foy?" Pender asked. "I suppose you must have."

"Well, I've sorted them: but I don't remember whether I read them or not. Probably I only looked at the dates.

The Canon seemed relieved. In his experience people invariably *did* remember letters—and everything else—of the kind he had suspected.

"There *are* precious few dates," Pender said. "And it is all a little complicated. Tom Firbis was many years younger than his half-brother, Edward. Edward, in fact, seems to have acted as guardian

to him. Tom was, of course, my grandfather Henry Kilmartin's uncle, though he was only ten when grandfather was born. Edward Kilmartin, my great-grandfather, was married to Roxana in 1845. But she was his second wife; she was not grandfather's mother: she was only his stepmother. She had one child of her own—a child that did not live. She died herself quite young, at the age of twenty-six. That was in 1849. You can see all the names and dates in the churchyard—all except Tom's, who doesn't seem to have been buried there. Grandfather was about nine years old when Roxana died, so he must have been able to remember her fairly well. Edward Kilmartin, however, lived to be a moderately old man. He was middle-aged when he married Roxana, though not so old as one would imagine from his portrait. Roxana, I'm afraid, had an un-rejuvenating influence."

The Canon looked again at the portrait to show he was taking an intelligent interest. In reality he felt a good deal lost among all these dates and relationships, which seemed extremely unimportant, and aroused in him nothing except a vague impulse to begin to talk about his own family. Miss Foy, on the other hand, was quite content to listen.

"I have been working it all out with the help of grandfather's notes. . . . A good many of the notes are yours, I imagine, Miss Foy. At any rate, they are not in his own handwriting."

"He frequently dictated to me," Miss Foy admitted pensively. "It was a task I dreaded. I wrote too slowly for him, and he sometimes got so impatient that he would snatch the papers up from the table before me, and stamp with his feet. . . . In the end I got so nervous that my writing became illegible even to myself. That, too, annoyed him very much."

"I'm glad you took the notes all the same," said Pender, smiling at her half-teasingly. "I find them enormously interesting, though horribly scrappy. And I wondered why they sometimes broke off so abruptly.

Each break, I suppose, represents an outburst of temper."

"He became very difficult to live with towards the end," the Canon murmured, with a suggestion of painful memories. "I have seen poor Nellie sit down and cry on coming home after paying him a visit. Miss Foy must have been wonderfully patient."

Pender's dark eyes were still fixed upon Miss Foy's face. "Yes," he said, "we all believe she was patient; but I wish she had known shorthand. I want those missing passages far more than grandfather ever did."

"If I had guessed——" Miss Foy began.

"Of course, a good many of the notes aren't of any use to me. He was more interested in the Kilmartins, while I am interested in Roxana, who never really became one of them, for all her marriage into the family. And I can find out so little about her. As a second wife—a wife, too, who had no surviving children—grandfather seems to have thought she didn't count. She remains mysterious: a disquieting guest: nothing more. She might have been discovered in the woods, like the lady Christabel, for all one knows of her. And she, too, had a secret. What else can account for the elderliness of poor Edward's portrait? It was painted as a present for her, a present bestowed on the anniversary of their wedding day. . . . Edward *must* have been rather a fool. . . . But I know I'm boring you horribly with these family affairs. The fact is, though you mustn't either of you breathe a word of it, I've begun to plan a memoir of Roxana."

His eyes turned from one to the other of his listeners, while the Canon said politely, "I can see it will be extremely interesting."

Pender regarded him for a moment before replying. "Well, if the only duty of a writer were to be interested himself——"

"In authorship it is at least half the battle," declared Miss Foy, with the air of one who has been present at the birth of many masterpieces. "I remember my

father often said so, when he sat down to compose a sermon."

The Canon stirred uneasily at this allusion to the Reverend Foy—happily deceased, and of deplorably Evangelical views.

"If one can conceive of Roxana from her present starry dwelling still looking down upon earthly things, she too might be interested," Pender said half-seriously, "but I cannot imagine anybody else being so. . . . Of course, I was only joking," he added. "I've hardly a vestige of solid fact to go upon. If I were really to attempt it, my memoir, I'm afraid, would be the wildest moonshine. But it does no harm to picture what it might have been, perhaps—if Miss Foy had known shorthand. . . . I believe you could still help me, Miss Foy, if you only would."

Miss Foy shook her head: she did not see how she could help at all. But this talk of memoirs reminded her of the Literary Society, and that the next meeting was to be held at her own house. She hoped Pender would be able to come, since it would be the last of the season. Mrs. Burton was going to read a paper on "The Faith of Robert Louis Stevenson."

Pender accepted with alacrity. He was sure the paper would be splendid. Would there be a discussion afterwards?

Miss Foy supposed there would: there usually was. His acceptance, nevertheless, though it was what she had appeared to want, seemed to have awakened misgivings in her mind. She presently voiced these, but with an air of reluctance that struck Pender instantly. The meeting threatened to be larger than usual, and she had so little room. Perhaps it ought to be held somewhere else. She had thought of asking Miss Tonie Ronayne. Or possibly it should be at Professor Heron's house, since Trefusis was going to recite some of his poems.

"Trefusis?" It was the first Pender had heard of him.

"Trefusis Heron, you know. Professor Heron's son. . . . He's a little boy."

"He's fourteen," said the Canon. "A youthful genius. His poems are to be published. You will be approached on the subject before long by Mrs. O'Clery."

"Well, after that, I can't miss the meeting wherever it's held," Pender said.

"I'm not quite sure myself—about his reciting," the Canon temporised doubtfully. "Perhaps some of the members—— Trefusis is a little difficult to stop once he is started. And since all this talk of publication he has been writing a great deal. There is no doubt he has a marvellous facility."

"I must get him to recite them to *me*," Pender declared. "Is he very shy?"

"Not in the least," replied Miss Foy, while the Canon chuckled softly.

II

Miss Foy having decided that she *would* ask Professor Heron to take charge of the meeting, thought of calling that very afternoon, and Pender, who recollected that the Professor had left a card upon him, offered to go with her. All three set out together, the Canon accompanying them as far as the croquet ground.

Professor Heron's house stood nearly at the top of the low, grass-covered cliffs on one side of the bay. It faced the sea, and was indeed not a stone's throw from the cliff's edge. The approach was by a steep, straight road, with a long line of houses—houses of all shapes, colours, and sizes—on one side of it, and the sea wall on the other. Half-way up, the coastguard station, with its tall flagpole, stood dazzlingly white in the sun.

Pender and Miss Foy climbed the hill slowly in the drowsy afternoon. They met nobody, but down below them, at the harbour mouth, three or four fishermen sprawled against the pier-end in attitudes of immemorial repose. The whirling sound of a windlass rose above the splash of the waves. The faint crowing of a cock came from an immense distance. And the smoke from the chimneys went up straight into the deep blue sky, while the air seemed to glitter and swim before them, as if filled with a powder of gold dust.

They found the Professor at home: they found him indeed in his study, standing, like a roosting bird, lightly poised on a single foot, on the back of an arm-chair. One hand rested on the topmost of the book-shelves which completely covered the four walls of the room; in the other he held an open volume he was apparently reading in this extraordinary position. Miss Foy stood still and drew in a sharp breath of alarm, while Professor Heron glanced brightly down upon them, his head slightly on one side, and even

Pender felt an impulse to rush forward with open arms to catch him as he fell. But he did not fall; he descended, nimble as a monkey, and had shaken hands warmly with them both long before Miss Foy had sufficiently recovered presence of mind to introduce her companion.

Introductions, however, so far as Professor Heron was concerned, were the idlest formalities. He rarely remembered names or faces, except those of his intimate friends, and he approached total strangers with the utmost affability. Pender had never met any one who struck him as being so full of life, energy, and happiness.

Miss Foy performed a belated ceremony of introduction, but for her own sake alone. The Professor did not even hear her. He had begun at once to talk and to laugh, with a curious, joyous laugh, infectious as that of a schoolboy. He was thin and agile, he had white ruffled hair, and a long white beard which descended far down over his breast. But nothing else about him suggested age. His manner was impetuous and vivacious, untouched by time or experience; his bright blue eyes were clear and innocent as a child's. Of course, he assented at once to Miss Foy's proposal that the Literary Society should meet at his house. He made a note of it immediately on a large engagement calendar, a note that Pender felt quite sure was not superfluous, for next moment he was eagerly chattering of the two versions of Chaucer's Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women.* He had changed his views as to which was the earlier. In his next edition the B. text would become the A. The present A. was really the unrevised text. Ten Brink had been right. He began to explain his reasons for this alteration of opinion, which appeared to cause him unmixed delight. He was like a child handling with swift skill a puzzle that had baffled everybody else, immensely pleased with his own dexterity, turning from Pender to Miss Foy as if they were all in the game together. Miss Foy accepted the new theory at once. Pender (unacquainted

with the famous prospectus) doubted if she had ever heard of *The Legend of Good Women*, but at the same time he felt that it would not have mattered if she had. *He* had read it, and was unable to perceive that it gave him the least advantage. Professor Heron simply took it for granted that they both knew the A. and the B. versions by heart. He went over his points one by one, with a happy little chuckle at the end of each. It would have taken hours, Pender saw, to convince him that the problem was not discussed daily at every breakfast table in Ballycastle.

But he liked the Professor, who, with the same boyish eagerness, now proceeded to show them a few of the treasures of his library, darting to and from the book-shelves with incredible rapidity, and twice at least performing alarming acrobatic feats similar to the one they had witnessed on their entrance.

Miss Foy sat in a silence that was broken only by intelligent exclamations. Pender himself found it difficult to do much more. He would have liked to make his exclamations a little less monotonous than Miss Foy's, but as a matter of fact there was not a great deal to choose between them, and the air became filled with " Ohs ! " and " Reallys ! " and their hands and their laps with an increasing collection of volumes.

It was astonishing how the simple errand which had brought them here should have developed into this bewildering bibliographical and philological entertainment. Nor did Pender see, encumbered as they were, that they could ever bring it to an end. He had long ago discovered Professor Heron's interest in literature to be a purely scientific one. He was like an excited entomologist with his pins and collecting-boxes, only his specimens were not dead butterflies and beetles, but words and texts. An attempt to turn the conversation to modern poetry (made solely with the idea of leading up to Trefusis) was so obviously hopeless that Pender hurriedly forsook it. He mentioned Trefusis directly.

Immediately he had done so he felt that something had happened. He saw Miss Foy dart a single glance at the clock (their visit had already lasted over an hour) and then sink back into her seat with an air of gentle stoicism. The Professor ceased to drag out books for them to look at. The book he had just taken from the shelf he put back again. He sat down, crossed one leg over the other, and leaned forward in his chair, his blue eyes intensely bright. Pender in all innocence had asked if Trefusis had holidays now, and he learned that he had never been to school. Something more interesting even than words had cropped up—something precious in a quite different way—and human. Many things Pender learned about Trefusis. Of his sensibility to music: when he was a baby his griefs could at any time be calmed by the mere playing or singing of a melody to him. He had first evinced a taste for poetry at the age of five. At seven he was able to repeat by heart *The Pleasures of Hope* and *The Deserted Village*. At twelve he had made considerable progress in the Greek and Latin tongues; and so far from finding such tasks irksome, had expressed his gratitude to his father in lines the Professor quoted from memory:—

"To thee the pleasing task has been assigned
To form with patient care my youthful mind,
Reveal the golden hoards of classic lore. . . ."

"I should like to see some of his poems," said Pender when the Professor had finished. "I wonder if he'd mind showing them to me?"

Professor Heron gave him a look of extreme friendliness. He dived into a drawer and produced a bundle of manuscript. "Of course he'd be delighted," he said. "I'll tell him when he comes in. . . . Here are some of them."

He turned the pages carefully, with a sort of grave, brooding joy, every now and again treating his visitors

to an extract, occasionally even to an entire poem. Pender listened. The poems produced upon him a quite unexpected effect, arousing a desire not so much to hear those left unsampled as to see Trefusis himself. For he utterly failed to form, from his work, even the dimmest, the most nebulous picture of that youth. The poems contained a surprising amount of information, but this information was never of the right kind. There were lines to Dr. Olphert, for instance, from which Pender gathered that it was largely owing to Olphert's devotion that Trefusis had recovered from an attack of measles. There were lines addressed to Colonel Richardson, from which it was quite clear that both Trefusis and the Colonel were Unionists and Orangemen :—

" Ulster, thy sons in brilliant vestments gleam :
Aloft in air their orange banners stream ;
While loudly sounds the enflowered and gore-stained drum,
And sweet shrill fife. . . ."

" That was written at the age of nine," said Professor Heron, after reading some verses celebrating the triumphs of electricity. " It is one of the earlier poems."

" Earlier ! " Pender repeated, in a kind of feeble protest. " Why, good heavens, at the age of nine I was trying to make pot-hooks ! "

" Trefusis, of course, is a genius," Miss Foy explained softly.

" Yes, I know ; but, dash it all—— Oh, do read that one," he begged, as his eye was suddenly caught by a title in which Mrs. Burton's name appeared. There might be a monotony in Trefusis's choice of metre, but there was none in his choice of subject.

The Professor looked up. " This ? These lines to Mrs. Burton ? "

" Yes. When were they written ? Whoever would have dreamed of Cousin Nellie inspiring poetry ! "

" They were written some months ago. The poem,

as a matter of fact, is one of the most ambitious Trefusis has attempted. . . . *Lines written to Mrs. Burton on the Occasion of her contributing an Elegy to the Church Magazine.* That is the full title."

"Yes: she sent me the elegy," Pender corroborated faintly. "She said it was the first she had decided to publish. It was about the war. But what does that matter?—we're wasting precious moments."

Professor Heron went on.

The intention of Trefusis's poem was to welcome Mrs. Burton to the "glorious band of female bards," and in the end it did welcome her. The "band," however, culled possibly from a historical work, was a large one. Trefusis included Sappho, and he did not omit Adelaide Anne Proctor. Naturally, therefore, it was some time before the youngest of a bright sisterhood appeared upon the scene. The Professor glanced up swiftly as he reached these lines:—

"Burton! on thee the Muse bestows her lyre
By Nature hallowed with celestial fire.
Now Ballycastle sees thy glory rise,
Thy fame unbounded as the trackless skies.
Daughter of Orpheus's lute! how rapt thine eye!
Flashing bright beams on every passer-by.
We see thee shine in awful virtue drest,
And all the graces of the female breast.
Friend of young poets, say wilt thou refuse
This daring offspring of a youthful Muse?"

"What did 'Burton' say?" gasped Pender. "*Did* she refuse it? She couldn't: nobody could."

"She was very much pleased," beamed Professor Heron. "She wrote to Trefusis to thank him. Her letter is here. . . ." He fumbled for it, and rapidly scanned the contents. "I see her only criticism is that she thinks the line in which she is first mentioned begins rather abruptly."

"Hypercriticism," cried Pender. "And nonsense

at that. It should begin abruptly. How else are we to symbolise 'Burton' bursting upon an astonished world—last of a glorious procession? Personally, I think it's immense. Burton 'in awful virtue drest.' I can see her. The thing is a pearl of price, and whatever Miss Foy says, *I* must have a copy."

"It will be included in the forthcoming volume, no doubt," was what Miss Foy said.

"I dare say; but do you imagine I can wait for the forthcoming volume?"

"I'm sure Trefusis will be delighted to make you a copy," chuckled Professor Heron. "I'll leave it out, and that will remind me to ask him."

"I wonder if you'd ask him not to post it, but to bring it to me himself," Pender begged. "Would he mind? I want very much to meet him."

"I'll tell him," said the Professor.

Pender followed Miss Foy out again into the sunshine. "He *is* rather a jolly old bird," he said, as they walked down the hill. "Of course, he's got Trefusis on the brain, and has about as much literary sense as other philologists. Still—— Canon Burton is writing an introduction, you say?"

Miss Foy glanced at him; then glanced again, this time with uncertainty. "But—— Don't you think the poems are good?" she ventured, hesitatingly.

Pender, evidently in the highest spirits, narrowed his eyes. "I think the lines to 'Burton' are more than good," he said. "And what does it matter—except, perhaps, to Trefusis himself, later on. I want to see Trefusis."

Miss Foy seemed slightly mystified, but she accepted these remarks as commendatory. They had reached the foot of the hill now, and branched off to the right.

"Rather a fine dog: whose is it?" Pender asked, as if still uplifted by some secret joy.

Miss Foy turned to look. "Oh. That is Tim—Tonie Ronayne's Tim. . . . He must have been shut out."

Pender stood still, and Miss Foy stood still also.

The bulldog seated on the doorstep had raised two round, ingenuous eyes when his name was spoken. His red tongue flickered lightly over his black nose, but he did not get up. "Do you think I might venture to introduce myself?" Pender asked, taking a step forward. "I might scratch his wrinkles."

"No, I shouldn't," murmured Miss Foy nervously.

But Tim received a few pats amicably. He always returned caresses, and began now hastily, though in a slightly *distrait* manner, to lick Pender's face.

Nearly at the same moment a shrill yapping pierced the air, and a small, black, furry creature flashed across the street, as if bent on an attack. Of course it was bluff, outrageous bluff, such as nine dogs out of ten—particularly dogs of Tim's size—would have ignored. Tim happened to be the tenth. There was a faint shriek from Miss Foy, and then—all that Pender saw as he picked himself up from the footpath was a cloud of dust in the centre of which a small black form oscillated violently. A minute later two doors on opposite sides of the street were thrown open, and from one issued Jack Burton, from the other Miss Ronayne. The dust cloud, the half-choked yelps of terror increased amazingly.

"Look out!" cried Miss Ronayne's deep voice, as she pushed Jack Burton aside. Her large muscular hand took a firm grip of Tim's collar, and there ensued a tug-of-war, Jack Burton composing Wopsey's team. The screams became frightful. Never could anybody have been less willingly present at the focus where vital forces unite than the wretched Wopsey. Something gave way—not on Miss Ronayne's side—and Tim was dragged back choking on to the sidepath. From his jaws protruded a large bunch of black fur—fur which had been carefully washed and combed not ten minutes ago. The unhappy Wopsey, rightful owner of the fur, crying still though almost fainting, was lifted from the ground, while Mrs. Burton rushed across the road to receive him in her arms.

Her cheeks were purple; her bosom heaved; she faced them all "in awful virtue drest."

"Very sorry, Mrs. Burton," Miss Ronayne apologised. "But it was your animal's fault, you know. I saw the whole thing from the window."

Mrs. Burton was inarticulate. Taking no notice of anybody, not even of Pender, she returned to the house, carrying her darling, and the door shut behind her.

There was a short pause: then, "Here! You'd better drop some of that fur," Miss Ronayne remarked to Tim. "It creates a bad impression." And she began to pick it from his mouth.

Jack Burton, grinning callously, lit a cigarette.

"It was your dog's fault, Jack," Miss Ronayne reasserted, turning to him. "He ran straight at Tim, barkin' as hard as he knew how. You'll have to calm down your mother about it, or she'll never speak to me again."

"Oh, *that's* all serene," answered Jack easily, his fat, round face wreathed in smiles. "Serves the little beast right. Hope he's jolly well done for."

Miss Ronayne eyed him unfavourably. "Tim's as quiet as a lamb," she added to a small but incredulous audience which had by this time collected.

"We saw that," Jack remarked facetiously, while his half-shut beady eyes gleamed.

"Only, he can't stand cheek," Miss Ronayne went on, "never could. . . . *You* saw how it happened, Miss Foy?" she appealed unexpectedly.

Miss Foy, thus directly addressed, was obliged to reply. "Yes, Wopsey on this occasion—certainly assumed the aggressive."

"That's just what I say," Miss Ronayne took up, catching at the word. "And Tim can't stand the aggressive—hence the flyin' fur. Well, you'll have to do the best you can for me with your mother, Jack. I leave it in your hands."

"I hope it wasn't my fault," said Pender. "I was patting Tim at the time."

Miss Ronayne chuckled. "So I noticed."

"Let me introduce Mr. Pender," said Miss Foy hurriedly.

Miss Ronayne shook hands. "You had nothin' in the world to do with it, Mr. Pender," she assured him. "It would have happened just the same if you hadn't been there." Then she added, perceiving that Jack Burton had departed, "Tim hates that little rat anyway, though I don't suppose he would have touched him if he hadn't barked. The bark settled it. The bark was an excuse." With which confidence Miss Ronayne gave the lamb-like Tim a pat on his broad head.

"Don't," said Miss Foy hastily. "Mrs. Burton may see you."

"D'you think she's watchin'?" Miss Ronayne gazed speculatively at the house opposite. "I dare say she is, too."

Pender, meanwhile, had begun to brush some of the dust from his clothes. Miss Ronayne observed him doing so. "I hope *you* didn't get much of a shakin', Mr. Pender?" she remarked. "Tim upset you, didn't he?"

"He did," Pender replied. "But of course I was in the way."

Miss Ronayne laughed a large, jolly laugh that was very much in keeping with her large build, her ruddy, weather-beaten complexion, her gray eyes and iron-gray hair. "You'd better come in and have a whisky and soda or somethin'," she proposed hospitably. "I feel as if I deserved one myself."

But Pender refused. "No, thanks," he replied. "I shall be very late as it is."

Miss Ronayne, however, was not easily put off. "Nonsense," she said frankly. "It'll help you on your journey and won't take a minute. He must come, Miss Foy, so tell him so." And she almost pushed them both up the steps, at the top of which her hall-door still stood open.

III

" I long to speak to some old lover's ghost."
DONNE.

THE adventures of this rather crowded afternoon vanished suddenly, as at the click of a drawn blind, when Pender found himself once more alone in his study. The memoir he had spoken of half-jestingly to the Canon and Miss Foy was not really that vague dream-thing of the future he had declared it to be; it had become a definite project, though just how it was to be carried out he had not yet determined. To-night he felt on the verge of discovery; the thing, after all, would have to be in great part imaginative: and once again he looked through his grandfather's notes, and turned over bundles of old letters.

The letters were curiously tantalising. There were several from Edward Kilmartin to his " dear wife," written during an absence from home, when he had been visiting London and Oxford: all the rest were from Tom. Pender read Edward's letters first. They were stilted, formal, pedantic, and of an unconscionable length. Nevertheless, he could perceive in them a genuine emotion, struggling feebly to express itself through the frozen pomposity of a Johnsonian style. What had Roxana made of them? It was even rather odd to find her keeping them. For if she had kept these, Pender argued, she must have kept everything, and a close and prolonged search had failed to unearth anything else. And why had she been left at home? At the period of Edward's jaunt they had been married barely a year. Surely a trip to London would have pleased her above all things. She had been left behind, however, and Pender, glancing suddenly up at her, had an impression that her eyes met his with an

expression of Christian resignation. The young, neglected wife—alone—eating her heart out in solitude while her lord gallivanted here and there, taking his pleasure —no, she could not quite sustain that pathetic rôle. Her resignation, he was certain, had *not* been Christian. Nor had Edward gallivanted. Far from it. How those phrases of excellent counsel with which he invariably concluded must have infuriated her! What bloodless things the whole batch of letters must have appeared —cold, stiff, and unappetising—the congealed gravy of morality. That is, if she had ever read them; for Roxana, Pender suspected, was a person who had strongly resented being bored. Probably she had merely glanced through them for items of news. Her whole life here, shut up in this grim, dark, lonely house, must have been appalling. Edward was dull. He had brains, but they were not of a kind Roxana would appreciate. Pender was not sure that she would particularly appreciate *any* kind. She wanted life and beauty and amusement and a passion that turned naturally to gaiety, not to brooding and to liquor.

And Edward had not been amusing: he could swear to that if he could swear to nothing else. Edward had been jealous and horribly suspicious, forcing upon her this weary seclusion for the very reason that her nature was so opposed to it. It was plain that the mysterious journey had been undertaken mainly for conscientious reasons. Anxiety had prompted it. Anxiety about his young half-brother, concerning whose progress bad reports must have been received at home. And, after all, it appeared to have been a wild-goose chase. He had not found Tom. He had missed him in London: he had missed him again at Oxford, where he had interviewed his tutor: Tom, as Roxana was duly informed, had deliberately avoided him. Tom, drawing now to the end of his second year at college, was not giving satisfaction. He never *had* given satisfaction—for all his plausibility and high spirits. Roxana did not know him, but Edward did.

Yet Pender could discover nothing definite against poor Tom—nothing beyond this very vague charge, and a complaint that he was devoting too much time to playing the fiddle. Hardly a fault, one would have imagined, to necessitate a special journey—above all, one undertaken in so morose a spirit. But there it was. Edward feared a scandal. Some startling rumour of eccentricity had reached him—eccentricity always so much more to be dreaded than downright viciousness.

There was a letter, undated, from Tom himself—the only letter written to his brother—the only surviving one at least—in which he expressed a desire to leave the university without taking a degree. He wanted to go to Italy to study music. He wanted to go at once. This disturbing letter, which bore traces of its writer's impetuosity, had evidently been called forth by a communication urging on him the necessity of making up his mind definitely as to what he intended to do when he came down. There were various reputable professions, but music, as Edward pointed out, was not one of them. Music was all very well as an amusement for one's leisure hours, but no serious person would think of devoting his life to it. It was an accomplishment, not a profession—not a profession for a gentleman, at all events. And Tom, even if he wasn't a serious person, even if he flouted the traditions of his class, must do something. Such fortune as would be his on his coming of age would not be sufficient to support him in idleness. What of the Church? The Church would give him abundant leisure to play the fiddle. It was obvious that, to Edward, professional musicians were a long-haired, greasy crew, scarcely to be distinguished from conjurors and other mountebanks. Most assuredly he did not desire one in the family.

The Church! The mere suggestion of it, to Pender, seemed to indicate the desperate straits to which the harassed Edward had been driven. Tom as a curate *would* be unsatisfactory, if you like. Pender did not

marvel that the boy's reply should have betrayed, besides its impatience, a scarcely repressed contempt for his brother's standards and opinions. For that matter, no great love appeared to have been lost between them. All Tom's other letters were written to Roxana, and were amazingly different in tone. They were young, gay, easy, filled with light-hearted gossip, and with sundry inquiries after the "dragon." Pender raised his eyes to that dark, heavy face, suffused with blood, ready to scowl, to look pious, or to leer amorously. No, Roxana assuredly had not shown these letters, and, if it came to that, she ought never to have received them. She never *would* have received them, he felt certain, if she had not written others of her own in a similar vein.

Tom's letters were nearly all undated; their exact order was difficult to determine; but there was a sharp dividing line drawn between the last two or three and all that had gone before, though these, too, were without date. From the later letters the gossip, the light-heartedness and playfulness, had disappeared; something had happened, or was going to happen; they were strange, guarded, and all references to the "dragon" had ceased.

Pender, reading them, seemed to divine one half of a drama which in imagination he began to fill out. If only he had Roxana's replies! And why did Tom's letters break off so abruptly? There was no *last* letter. What had happened to him? Had he actually gone down without taking a degree? Had he gone to Italy? But there were no letters from Italy. Pender had gathered vaguely from his grandfather's notes that Tom had gone abroad, but on this point also the notes were obscure in the extreme. And whither, and when, had he gone? And why had he ceased to write? He seemed to have disappeared utterly, leaving no message, no clue; to have passed out of the lives of everybody far more completely than if he had died. Was there something disgraceful, unmentionable, then; something

to be hushed up and forgotten? Was the dust he had begun to stir of unsavoury, of evil odour? Was there something that his grandfather did not know? Those others at least must have known—Edward and Roxana. But they would never tell now. Nobody would tell. Death, with his rattling keys, had them all safely locked up.

Yet even as he reached this conclusion Pender had a strange sensation. He felt that this room knew, and could tell much if its walls should by chance become articulate—was positively trying to tell him at this moment. He deliberately cut off *that* mysterious current of communication, which appeared to be establishing itself. No, he did not want things to come in that way. . . .

Tom's early letters were rather jolly, and Pender found himself very much in sympathy with him, and also, though for not quite so good a reason, with the lady who had inspired them. It was clear that she had taken Tom's part: it was clear that some sort of *camaraderie* had existed between them from the beginning.

The last letter of all dropped from his hand as he leaned back in his chair and looked out into the darkened garden. It was strange that this dead dust should have moved so at his presence, that these vanished lives should haunt his mind, be so intensely real to him. It was stranger still that he should feel every time he returned to the house, after even the briefest absence, that he was returning to *them*. This room, he guessed, had been Roxana's. The moon that had risen outside, and shone down now on the black, motionless boughs of the great cedar overshadowing his window, had shone upon it on those summer nights when young Tom had played his fiddle to Roxana. They had wandered out together afterwards into that same garden, while Edward sat brooding over his wine in the dining-room. He wondered if it was really because of his past illness that he was so responsive to the

queer suggestions which floated in upon him. The barriers of sense seemed to have worn alarmingly thin. There were all sorts of chinks and cracks and crannies through which a wild, lovely light gleamed. His mind was very like this old draughty house through which blew mysterious winds, awakening uncanny whistlings and whisperings. A breath, a touch was sufficient to set the whole place humming and shrilling like the strings of an aeolian harp. . . .

A sudden crash startled him. He could feel his heart thumping violently, and for two or three minutes he sat absolutely still, his hands gripping the arms of his chair. A vase that had held a bunch of roses lay in fragments in the grate. The vase had been light and the flowers heavy; it must have overbalanced, or perhaps a puff of wind had caught it, for the casement door had blown back flat against the wall. Lifting his eyes to the white dial of the clock on the chimney-piece, he saw that the hands had moved on, marking nearly an hour of which he retained no consciousness. He must have fallen asleep, yet he had no recollection of even feeling drowsy. He was the lightest of sleepers, and anyone entering the room would have awakened him, yet an impression grew upon him that the room *had* been visited while he slept. No feeling of uneasiness accompanied this fancy. If there had been a watchful eye bent upon him, it had watched him without inimical intent. Of course, it was only his imagination, yet, as the coming of the angel troubled the pool of Bethesda, the atmosphere of the room seemed still to vibrate faintly with the movement of one who had but this moment quitted it.

He got up and opened the door into the passage. In the distance he heard the footsteps of Mrs. West approaching, and he hastily retreated back into his room. She was much later than usual. She knocked at the door and entered.

There was nothing ghostly about Mrs. West, at all

events, nor was she yet an angel. She was the only person Pender had ever seen to whom the epithet "apple-cheeked" might truthfully be applied, and her whole plump person suggested the very warmest flesh and blood. With a clinking of glasses she placed a tray on a little table where he could reach it, before she noticed the broken litter in the grate.

"I just thought that vase wouldn't hold all them roses," she said, pursing her lips. "I'd best wipe up the water at once."

She hurried off and returned with a dust-pan and a cloth. She gathered up the deep crimson roses, and laid them with their dark leaves on the table; then, going down on her knees, mopped up the water and swept the fragments of blue and white china on to her pan. "You'll be feeling lonely, to-night, Master Rex, without the Doctor," she said.

Pender gazed at her broad, comfortable back with envy. Mrs. West, he was certain, was exactly the kind of person human beings were intended to be: she was a sort of domestic Rock of Ages. Not all the ghosts in Ramoan graveyard could break down the barrier of her robust common sense. They might tap and whine and twitter, but she would never hear them. She was like a tree—an oak or a beech—in its late summer prime, and beside her he felt himself a mere drift of withered leaves. "Yes, I'm afraid he won't come now," he said. "It is past his time."

"Will you be wanting anything more, then, sir, or will I go to bed?" Mrs. West inquired.

"Go to bed, by all means. If the Doctor does happen to turn up he'll come round to the window."

"Well, I think you've got everything." And Mrs. West moved a questing glance over the room. "You don't want me to shut the windys?"

"No, thanks."

Mrs. West looked at him. Her eyes were searching and maternal, and beneath their steady gaze Pender, as usual, felt himself sliding rapidly back into his

earliest teens. "I wouldn't sit up too late, Master Rex," she advised firmly, "especially after you tramping the country all afternoon."

"I didn't really tramp a great deal," Pender argued boyishly, "but I will probably go to bed in an hour or so. You can't tell me it's late, you know," he added, as Mrs. West still lingered. "It's only a few minutes past eleven."

"Early to bed and early to rise," Mrs. West quoted sagely. "Not that I'd recommend early rising in your case just yet awhile, though this past week you've been looking better than you've ever done."

"I feel better, too," said Pender. "And I've been to sleep already, so I shall be all right."

"Ah, but it's not the same, sleeping in a chair, as sleeping in your own comfortable bed," Mrs. West warned him. "There's something does you good in the very touch of the sheets and the pillow."

"But a chair's better than nothing," Pender sighed, "particularly if it's the only thing you *can* sleep in. When I go to bed I lie awake."

"They say that watching sheep passing through a gate——"

"I know, I've tried it. I could watch all the sheep in Ireland without so much as a yawn. . . . How long have you lived in this house, Mrs. West?"

Mrs. West paused while she reckoned up the years. "I've lived here forty-two years—forty-three it'll be next November. I came as a girl of sixteen."

"But you weren't here all that time, were you?"

"All but four months. Four poor months was what Tim West lived after I married him. I knew he was dying when I did it—though it wasn't for love of me. It was consumption he had, like all his family. It was that persuaded me, for Tim wasn't much of a man to look at, though a great one for converse. He had asked me two years before, but I couldn't make up me mind, and he kept on asking till he had me half

moithered. They was all against it at home, him being only the under gardener, and going like his brothers and sisters that galloped to the grave every one of them inside of six months. But he was the only man ever asked me; and he'd nobody to take care of him."

"You must remember Edward Kilmartin, then—my great-grandfather?"

"Oh, yes, I remember him: you inquired about him before, sir."

"But you didn't tell me anything," Pender answered petulantly. "And I didn't realise you were grown up at the time."

"There's little to tell," Mrs. West replied. "He'd had the first stroke, you see, before I came to the house, and all the time I was here he couldn't speak so that you could understand him. He lived in this room. It was divided off by screens to make a bedroom as well. He died in it, too, and it was after his death your grandfather shut it up. . . . If you want the truth, Master Rex, I was in terror of me life of him. You know how silly young girls of that age do be, with their minds full of blathers and nonsense."

Pender shook his head. "I'm sure you weren't silly at any age," he said. "What were you in terror about? He couldn't even walk, I suppose."

"That's just it. God knows it was just him himself in his chair, dressed all in black. He was a stout, big man, the way they could hardly move him, with a big bare face, and a wig. . . . And he didn't look good. He would scowl or mumble at you as if he hated you. I'd as lief have gone picnicking in the churchyard on Hallow Eve night as have gone into the room with him sitting by himself there in the dark. . . . No, he couldn't move, poor gentleman—couldn't move down all one side of him, not so much as an eyelid."

"I don't see what there was to be afraid of, then," Pender grumbled, "particularly when you were so kind to Tim West. After all, they were *both* ill and

needed looking after. And if it comes to that, I'm ill myself."

"Ah, but there was a sight of difference between them, Master Rex. It was the spirit in them. Tim West was like an innocent boy. And if the old gentleman had had a stroke, dear knows I believed then it was for some awful wickedness he had done. That's what they had us taught in the Sunday School, about Ananias and Nebuchadnezzar. And if you'll excuse him being your great-grandfather, Master Rex, he looked it."

"Nonsense. You're prejudiced. You're like all women: nothing pleases you except innocent boys—and there are no such things."

"Well—that may be as it may be," Mrs. West returned philosophically. "I never had a boy of my own to know much about them."

"You may be thankful for it. You've been saved a lot of worry and disillusionment. Some of them look promising enough for a few years, but the most promising turn out like me—objects of derision to everybody except their mothers. . . . Well, good-night, Mrs. West. All the same," he added, with his queer, half-melancholy smile, "I don't think you ought to have judged poor old Edward so much by his appearance."

"Indeed an' I don't do so now, Master Rex. As I say, I was only a flutter-headed girl at the time. . . . And I see you've taken a fancy to him, or you wouldn't have brought him in here."

Mrs. West gazed at the unprepossessing portrait with an expression intended to be nothing if not charitable. "Good-night, sir," she concluded, gathering up her dust-pan and cloth. "But I must say I think your own picture would look a sight nicer hanging there." And with this she left the room.

Pender lit a pipe and poured out a mild whisky and soda. He half wished Dr. Olphert *would* come now, though he felt none of the loneliness Mrs. West had

imputed to him. As he stood by the chimney-piece to stretch his legs a bit, occasionally sipping absently from the tumbler he had half-filled, his fingers moved over the carvings on one of the panels just level with his eyes. On the centre of this panel was a winged beast like a gryphon, cut in low relief: the border was composed of conventional leaves and flowers. Pender, leaning forward to replace his drink on the chimney-piece, pressed against the gryphon sideways, and it seemed to him that the whole panel shifted ever so slightly. He stared at it. "Probably they're all loose," he thought. But at the same time memories of romantic tales read in boyhood awoke in his mind, and he laid down his pipe. "Imagine being thrilled at my time of life by the stock Christmas story incident," he muttered to himself. "Roxana, dear, if you're making a fool of me, you won't get your book; that's all. . . . Now help me to find the spring."

Each flower, each leaf, each projecting point, he pressed in turn, but there was no answering click: nothing happened.

"Dash it all, I *felt* it moving," said Pender aloud.

He ran the blade of his knife along the top, bottom, and sides. They fitted closely, but there was certainly a joint: each single panel, he discovered, was inlaid separately. Pender dug his nails into the gryphon and gave the thing a tug sideways. Again he felt it yielding slightly.

"Suppose we try one of the others," he muttered. "Perhaps the whole beastly lot move." He tapped with his knuckles, but each panel gave back an equally hollow note. "They *all* can't be secret cupboards," said Pender disgustedly. "Mrs. West was right. It's high time I went to bed."

IV

PENDER awoke next morning, his mind full of secret passages, sliding panels, hidden chambers, and all the paraphernalia of rococo romance. The tattered fragments of dreams, wherein these things had figured, still hung about him, like bits of ruined tapestry in which a patch of colour, an isolated face or form, gleamed here and there, though the picture they belonged to was lost for ever. He felt a strong desire to begin his search at once, and immediately after breakfast asked Mrs. West to bring a tool chest to his study.

Mrs. West returned, not with a tool chest exactly, but with a wooden soap box, containing principally a large and varied assortment of ancient tack-lifters. At the same time she volunteered the suggestion that Michael would do what was to be done.

But Pender did not want Michael. Now that he had his tools (such as they were), he did not want Mrs. West either. "I don't know that there is anything to be done," he said. "It is just in case I *should* require a hammer or a chisel."

He rummaged about among the contents of the soap box, while Mrs. West watched him, repressing with difficulty her natural curiosity. "If it's the shutters or the blinds," she hinted, "I'd advise you to leave it to Michael, and at any rate I'd better bring in the steps."

"It isn't," Pender replied. "I never use the shutters *or* the blinds." He hesitated, and then, assuming an air of the utmost nonchalance, asked, "By the way, Mrs. West, I suppose you never heard of a—eh—secret cupboard or anything of that sort?"

He put the question as if it were the most ordinary one in the world, but as he strolled over towards the

fireplace he carefully avoided Mrs. West's eye. That lady, suspending her answer, gazed at him in soundless suspicion. "Secret cupboards!" she at last repeated dubiously. "The only cupboards I know of is in the kitchen and pantry."

"Yes—eh—quite so," Pender murmured. "I didn't mean just that kind of cupboard, of course—but it doesn't matter." He smiled apologetically. Then, as she still seemed to wait for an explanation, "It's only that I fancied this panelling sounded rather hollow—as if there might be something behind it."

Mrs. West removed her gaze from Pender to the panelling in question. Her attitude, he felt, was slightly depressing. "If there's anything behind the panelling it's only bricks and mortar," she declared after further and yet more stolid consideration. "There's no secret passages ever *I* heard tell of.''

"No. I didn't quite mean that either," Pender began vaguely. Then, "It's of no consequence, really," he broke off.

But Mrs. West, for her own reasons, appeared to think it *was* of consequence. She looked at him searchingly as she questioned in her turn. "You're surely not thinking of taking down that panelling, Master Rex?"

"No, no. It's all right. I should never dream of such a thing," Pender hastened to assure her.

But it is easier to awaken doubts than to lull them, and Mrs. West was now visibly distrustful. "If you heard anything, it might have been a mouse," she persisted. "Though I must say the house, for an old house, is pretty free from them."

"Yes, quite. . . . Well, that's all I want, Mrs. West."

He buried himself behind yesterday's newspaper, and Mrs. West withdrew, though reluctantly. At the door she stopped. "I'll leave the cat in here to-night," she said. "She won't do any harm, and if there's a mouse——"

"Thanks. I don't think there are any mice," Pender answered gently, "but I shall be glad of the cat's company, of course."

He rustled his paper, and heard the door closing, though he still had a feeling that Mrs. West was not far away. He read on for a few minutes, just in case she *should* pop in her head: then, at last, he ventured to begin his investigation. With a foot-rule and hammer in his hand, and with all the caution of a burglar, he made a preliminary tour of the room. He was very methodical. He tapped at walls, he examined mouldings and recesses, he calculated the depths of spaces, though it was a little difficult to see, perhaps, how the remarkable knowledge he thus acquired was going to be of much use to him. The morning wore on, and found him still measuring and tapping. He had begun to feel discouraged, however, and it even occurred to him that he was making rather an ass of himself, when—

"Master Trefusis Heron," Mrs. West suddenly announced.

She had come up again like a jack-in-the-box, taking him completely by surprise, and he hastily scrambled to his feet. He had been inspecting the skirting between the fireplace and the door—idiotically, as he now felt—and he was aware that her eyes were once more fixed upon him. She would think he was obsessed by this idea of mice (really her own invention), for he must have had all the appearance of searching passionately for holes. He felt hot, dusty, and slightly ridiculous.

And standing motionless in the doorway, just in advance of the housekeeper, manuscript in hand, was a fat, smallish boy of cherubic and freckled countenance. A shock of nearly white hair rose like a machine brush from his forehead, and indeed all over the top of his head. He had plump, ruddy cheeks, and his solemn eyes, perhaps in contrast with this strange mop of white hair, seemed unusually bright and unusually

gray. He was dressed untidily in a tennis shirt and crumpled flannels, with very short trousers that left considerably more than the knees of two remarkably thick legs bare.

"Oh, how are you?" Pender hurriedly asked, stepping forward with outstretched hand. "Awfully good of you to come. Sit down." He piloted Trefusis to an arm-chair, and then stood smiling amicably down upon him.

Trefusis had not smiled, but had turned upon this strange man a singularly steady gaze which never for an instant wavered. Pender felt that those limpid, steadfast, truthful eyes, even more than Mrs. West's, were subjecting him to a close examination, which, so far, had revealed nothing particularly favourable. He had, indeed, an idea that he had created a bad impression upon Trefusis—grubbing about with his nose in the skirting. Trefusis at length spoke,—

"I brought you the poem you asked for—the *Lines to Mrs. Burton.*"

"Yes—she's my cousin, you know—Cousin Nellie," Pender jerked, with an inappropriate and distracted laugh. "Thanks very much. It was very good of you to take the trouble."

"It was a pleasure," said Trefusis.

The kindness of these words, which left him still further in debt, seemed to have a paralysing effect upon Pender's brain. "Horribly hot, isn't it?" he began. "Won't you have a drink—I—eh—mean, something to eat? Ah, here's Mrs. West coming back."

Mrs. West, ever thoughtful, had reappeared with a tray on which were cake, glasses, lemonade, and a dish of strawberries. Trefusis regarded the food with the same extraordinary gravity as he had regarded Pender, but an expression of faint approval presently stole across his face. Pender observed it with relief. He tumbled out the strawberries lavishly, and pushed cream and sugar, and cake, which he had hastily cut

into thick slabs, over to Trefusis's side of the table: he even poured lemonade into two tumblers, though he loathed the stuff. Trefusis was pleased to accept these offerings.

"I like your poems very much," Pender began. "Your father read some of them to me yesterday, and of course I'll read the others myself when the book comes out."

"I might let you have the manuscript," Trefusis offered graciously. The influence of strawberries and cream was possibly beginning to work upon him, for at last he smiled. "I have duplicates of all the poems."

"Thanks; I'll take great care of them."

Again there was a silence, during which Pender regarded the poet rather askance. Trefusis appeared to him a little difficult—not from anything he had said, perhaps, for he had said practically nothing, but because his silence seemed so deliberate, and was accompanied by so alarming a composure. He did not look, either, in the least like a boy who would spend his time writing verses—or even reading them. Pender didn't just know what he *did* look like: certainly he bore no resemblance to his father. "Are you doing anything just now?" he inquired.

"Yes, I'm eating strawberries now," said Trefusis.

Pender started. He was this time really taken aback. It dawned on him that Trefusis might simply be that odious thing, a boy with a mistaken sense of humour, and he began to regret his rash invitation. He laughed perfunctorily, but not the ghost of a smile appeared on the face of his visitor. Trefusis went on with his meal, not hurriedly, but steadily, methodically. His gray eyes watched Pender when they were not fixed upon his plate, though once they turned to the clock, and immediately afterwards he consulted a very large, fat, silver watch.

"You're not in a hurry, I hope?" Pender asked politely.

"I can stay till a quarter past one," said Trefusis.

This caused Pender in turn to glance rapidly at the clock. Since it was not yet twelve, he decided that Trefusis's words might be construed as complimentary. He racked his brains for something to talk about, poetry being evidently a failure.

"Unless I'm in your way," Trefusis suddenly added.

"Not a bit. I'll be delighted." After all, Trefusis *was*, perhaps, rather nice.

"I must tell you what I was doing when you came in. But first of all (poets are peculiarly sensitive to their surroundings, I've been told): first of all, then —is there anything about this room that strikes you? Anything, I mean, that seems unusual?"

Trefusis withdrew his gaze from Pender's face and turned it slowly round the four walls. "The green light is unusual," he replied after due deliberation, "though strictly speaking it can hardly be called a part of the room."

"No. . . . I didn't quite mean just the actual room, though. . . . If it comes to that, I'm afraid I'm not very sure what I *did* mean. . . . Let us put it this way. . . .

"Does this room give you an impression that it possibly contains a secret hiding-place? Is there that kind of *feeling* about it, I mean? A secret hiding-place, you see, is what I was looking for when you came in."

This time at any rate he had found the right subject. If he had not touched a spring behind the panelling, he had touched something very like one in Trefusis. A subtle transformation took place in that remarkable boy. He pricked up his ears, as it were; his eyes widened and deepened; and each hair of his white wiry mop seemed to become charged with the electricity of expectation. Secret hiding-places were obviously very much more in Trefusis's line than in Mrs. West's.

"Did you find it?" he asked, and on Pender's shaking his head, gave a sigh of relief.

"I'll help you to look for it," he promised. "I needn't go at a quarter past one. I needn't go at any time. It doesn't matter if I'm late."

"But I've looked for it already," said Pender doubtfully. "I've searched everywhere."

Trefusis's enthusiasm had a momentary check. "What makes you think there is one?" he asked with a faint note of suspicion in his voice. "You're not just making fun?"

"No, I'm not making fun. But I don't know why I think there is one. That's the tantalising part of it. Being a poet, I thought you might understand, for certainly nobody else will. There are some old letters I want, and I believe they're hidden here—somewhere—if I could only lay my hands on them."

"Are they *your* letters?" Trefusis asked.

"Do you mean, did I write them?"

"Yes."

"No. They're ever so old. They were written when my grandfather was a boy. Of course, they may have been destroyed, but I can't get it out of my mind that they weren't. They were written by her"—he pointed to Roxana's portrait—"and she hid them because they were love letters."

Trefusis stared at Roxana for quite a long time. "But if she wrote them, how did she have them to hide?" he objected. "Wouldn't the person she sent them to have them?"

"She got them back again," Pender explained, inspired to fresh efforts by the presence of an audience. The fruitlessness of his morning's search was forgotten, the spirit of the chase entered into him again, and he felt capable of explaining more and more. "She wrote something else, too—a secret—something perhaps rather horrid—about *him*." And he pointed this time to Edward.

The mouth of Trefusis formed a little, round O. The pupils of his eyes dilated. "*How* horrid?" he asked eagerly. "*Really* bad?—wicked?—*devilish*?"

Pender laughed, but he answered, "Yes—really bad—really wicked."

"A crime?" Trefusis urged.

"Yes—possibly a crime."

"Murder?" Trefusis breathed huskily.

Pender started, for the suggestion *was* to him startling. For a moment he boggled at it, but only because it made him see the whole thing afresh, in a new and much more lurid light. "Murder, perhaps—I don't know. Something pretty wrong, anyway.... He *could* murder somebody, you think?"

Trefusis hesitated; then slowly nodded his head.

"Well, we must find the letters."

Trefusis still hesitated. He had turned back to Roxana. "Do you think she'd *want* us to find them?" he unexpectedly asked, putting a question Pender had already put to himself.

"She does. I'm sure of it. She'd tell us herself where to look if she could. She seemed, while I was looking this morning, to be trying to tell me all the time. But she told me I was cold—cold—and no matter what part of the room I moved to, I grew no warmer."

"Then they're not *in* the room," Trefusis promptly decided.

"Not in the room!" Pender echoed; and paused a little blankly. "But if they're not in the room where are they? I'm nearly sure this was her room—the room she used. If they're not here I'm afraid they aren't anywhere."

"All the things now in it aren't hers, are they?" Trefusis asked. "Where are her things?"

Pender looked at him, but Trefusis was still gazing at the picture. Then a light slowly dawned. "You mean—— You mean I should try to get hold of what *was* hers!" he suddenly saw. "I never thought of that. What an owl I am! You're right. We'll ask Mrs. West. No; she wouldn't tell us: she wouldn't know, at any rate. And besides, this is a secret.

There's a lumber-room upstairs. We'll go and look for ourselves."

Trefusis sprang to his feet. He was ready, he was eager ; so, too, was Pender. They climbed four flights of stairs, coming out on a long, narrow landing lit by a single window with lozenge-shaped leaded panes of very thick glass.

Trefusis, all agog for adventure, seemed to have cast from his shoulders the burden of poetic responsibility, and Pender, excited too, felt that for the time being they were equals and contemporaries. He turned a stiff, grinding key, pushed open a door, and they stood on the threshold of a large, low room, lit by two tall, narrow windows, leaded like the windows in the landing, and set deep in the thick wall. Through the dusty, cobwebby glass the light entered, dimmed to a soft twilight. Something darted across the floor, and there was a rustle among a heap of old papers in the farthest corner.

" A mouse," said Trefusis, rolling back his eyes in the manner of a young dog. " Or mice," he added.

" Mice, certainly," Pender agreed.

He stood still, his eagerness gradually subsiding, as a subtler, quieter influence cooled it and dimmed it. Did this shadowy, silent room *really* contain the object of their search ? It was littered, but not crowded, with old furniture, old ornaments, even a picture or two turned with their faces to the wall. The air was heavy with that peculiar smell of mingled dust and decay which comes when things are left for a long time undisturbed. Pender, crossing the room, tried to open a window, but the latch was rusty and would not move. A festoon of cobwebs clung to his hand when he abandoned the attempt.

He turned round. Trefusis was peering about among the furniture, some of it shrouded in discoloured linen sheets, most of it three-legged and rickety, the upholstery torn, or faded into an appearance of pathetic decrepitude. Yes, mice as well as time had been at

work here—mice and moths were responsible for much of the rent cloth and protruding stuffing. Here and there a more solid piece, a chest of drawers with a brass handle or two wanting, a cabinet with a broken door, stood out as in robust middle-age from decayed senility. A large dulled mirror, in a frame of tarnished gilt, leaned against the wall, and reflected the movements of Trefusis with a ghostly mimicry, so that a second and phantom boy seemed noiselessly to raise stained yellow linen wrappings, to peep into drawers, to lift the lids of boxes.

And Trefusis was flitting hither and thither, like a butterfly in a garden. In a big oak chest he had discovered some ancient naval uniforms which temporarily diverted him from the search proper. Pender recognised the symptoms of found treasure. That reluctance to put his spoils away, that pensive lingering over their tarnished finery, could mean but one thing.

"Do you like dressing up?" he asked.

"I love it," Trefusis sighed.

"Well, this isn't a very good place for it, but you may bring the things down to one of the bedrooms."

"Oh, thanks awfully," Trefusis cooed, and he closed the heavy lid.

He resumed the original quest. Pender left the hunt now altogether to him, perhaps because, secretly, he only half believed in it, perhaps because he saw that it was being carried out exhaustively, if without much method, for Trefusis had sudden inspirations that sent him flying from one end of the room to the other, and which, in the process, led to several shrill though premature squeals of triumph. The final squeal came from behind a wardrobe which stood out a little from one of the corners. Next moment Trefusis emerged thence, in haste and on all fours, with cobwebs in his hair.

"Mr. Pender—quick," he cried. "I've found it!"

Pender crossed the room and helped him to drag the

wardrobe to one side. He was more amused than convinced by Trefusis's excitement.

Yet there it stood—an old, and at one time evidently highly ornate desk, resting, not very securely, upon four spindle legs, from two of which the castors had been broken. It was extremely dirty now, but a vigorous rubbing with Pender's pocket-handkerchief revealed a broken pattern of pink and black mosaic. Many of the stones were missing, but sufficient remained to show that the desk must once have presented an appearance a little too splendid for quite good taste. Trefusis was tugging at the lid.

"It's locked!" he muttered. "Locked!"

Pender tried it, but the lock, though small, was stouter than he had expected, and he saw they would either have to smash the lid or find a key that fitted. He shook the desk, but could hear nothing moving inside. "It's empty, Trefusis. I don't think there's much use in forcing it. If there was anything inside, we should hear it. . . . You've got your uniforms at all events. I'm afraid we'll have to be content with that."

But Trefusis was not content. He looked at Pender for a moment or two in silence, and reproachfully. "Aren't you even going to bring it downstairs?" he then said. "It's quite light. We could easily carry it between us."

"We'd only have to carry it up again," Pender demurred good-humouredly. "Try for yourself; you can hear there's nothing in it."

Trefusis tried; he tried several times.

"You shake it again," he said, holding his ear close while Pender, to please him, tilted the desk over and jerked it up and down.

"Well?" he smiled.

"I think I almost *did* hear something," said Trefusis, but a little shamefacedly.

Pender laughed. "You've a powerful imagination, my son. But we'll bring it downstairs if you like."

Trefusis gave him no time to change his mind. He had lifted his end in a trice, and between them they carried the desk down to the study, setting it near one of the windows.

Pender produced all the keys in his possession. One by one he handed them to Trefusis, but though several were small enough to enter the little lock, it did not yield, and the lid, for all their efforts, remained obstinately closed.

"One would very nearly think it *had* a secret to keep," said Pender, as he observed the portentous frown upon Trefusis's brow, and the pursing of his lips. "Shall we send for a locksmith (I suppose there is such a thing somewhere in the village?) or shall we try to pick it ourselves? First, however, I think we had better have lunch: the gong has rung twice already."

Trefusis left the desk with obvious reluctance. But after he had washed himself and was seated at table his appetite returned, and he did ample justice to the good things provided for him. He was by this time bosom friends with Pender, and chattered freely. But his host, as he listened, felt more and more dubious about the poems. He wondered if he ought to tell Professor Heron his true opinion of them, though it would be very difficult to do so, and he supposed Trefusis himself would be bitterly disappointed if they did not appear. He guessed that Trefusis had never had a friend of his own age. Indeed, in the peculiar conditions of his life, it would have been surprising if he had had one. Nearly everybody in Ballycastle, except a few little girls, seemed to be grown up; the boys were all either message boys or farmers' boys. Of course, in the holidays there must be others. He wondered how Trefusis got on with them.

When they returned to the study they brought a new supply of keys, furnished by Mrs. West, but these proved quite as useless as the former lot, and Trefusis began to finger a large blunt chisel.

"Shall we pick the lock?" he asked.

Pender looked from the chisel to the desk. The word "pick" he took to be in the nature of a euphemism. "Well, it seems to be pretty much on its last legs," he said. "I don't suppose it matters."

Trefusis waited for no more. He hammered in the chisel, there was a hideous sound of rending wood, and chisel and hammer clattered to the floor.

"You've picked it," said Pender.

He watched Trefusis control his impatience, while he waited for permission to proceed. He could not help prolonging the suspense for just a moment or two.

"Suppose, when you open it, Trefusis, a column of smoke rises up to the ceiling, and takes the form of a frightful genie!"

"No such luck," replied Trefusis briefly; and indeed, when he lifted the lid, the desk was empty.

"I thought so," Pender murmured, while Trefusis stared at that disappointing emptiness, from which arose no genie, but only a faint fragrance of sandal-wood.

"We've smashed it for nothing," he said.

But Pender had not finished yet. "Perhaps not. Try the pigeon-holes."

Trefusis thrust his hand into one after another. "There's nothing in them," he sighed ruefully. "Not the least little thing."

Pender gazed thoughtfully into the desk. "There's bound to be a secret drawer somewhere," he murmured. "That kind of desk always *does* have one. Of course, if there had been anything in it, we should have heard it move when we shook it; but still we may as well find the drawer."

The gloom of Trefusis brightened somewhat. A secret drawer, even if empty, was still a secret drawer.

"Don't the pigeon-holes at the sides go farther back than those in the middle?" Pender asked. "Just have a try: you'll be able to feel without measuring."

Trefusis was busy in a moment. "They do," he

squeaked eagerly. "But I can't feel any spring. I can't feel anything. They're all quite smooth at the back."

"Pull those slips of wood at the sides. . . . No—not that way—outwards. . . . Try that one beside the ink-bottle, then. Pull it upwards."

Trefusis did so, and there was a sudden click, followed by a suppressed shriek from the investigator.

"You've got it," cried Pender. "That whole middle section ought to come away now. Slide it up."

Trefusis obeyed—gave it, in fact, so sharp a tug that something snapped and the entire piece came out.

"Gently, gently," said Pender. "You've broken it."

Behind the pigeon-holes was a cavity, into which Trefusis thrust his hand.

"Empty," said Pender, a little prematurely, for the cavity was not empty. From it Trefusis, this time really in triumph, drew out a black case of soft leather. Age had snapped the elastic band that had once bound it. The band was now but a loose bit of tape, which Trefusis pulled away with hurried fingers. He lifted the flap and took out the contents, handing them to Pender.

These contents were a flat, square, leather case, closed with a spring; a very short lock of silky, corn-yellow hair; and a bundle of old letters.

PART V

THE AWAKENING

I

With the influx of summer visitors Ballycastle had become transformed. The shops had renewed their stocks, all the houses were occupied, cards advertising rooms disappeared from parlour windows, and the two hotels were crowded. There were people everywhere, at all hours of the day—on the sands, on the golf-links, on the tennis-courts, in the streets—not too many people, for house-accommodation was limited; but the whole place was gay, bright, animated with a careless, holiday life, while the old life went on underneath, the small select circle of permanent residents held itself slightly aloof from the heterogeneous crowd whose outdoor amusements it shared, and invited only a favoured few of that crowd to cross its doors.

Thus it was that Pender, on the night of the meeting of the Literary Society, found none but familiar faces gathered there.

"I hear you're going to recite," he observed to Trefusis, whom he had not seen since their memorable treasure hunt, and who now met him at the door.

Trefusis, squeezed into an Eton suit which he had outgrown circumferentially, shook his white mop. "Father says I'm not to—not in our own house. Mrs. Burton's paper may be rather long; and they like to play bridge afterwards. At any rate, if I made gestures in these clothes they'd burst. I'm almost frightened to shake hands."

Pender went on in. He found he had arrived a little

late, and slipped unobtrusively into a seat beside Miss Tonie Ronayne, just as Mrs. Burton rose, manuscript in hand.

"Tim's here," Miss Ronayne whispered to him portentously. "I left him in the kitchen. I didn't know he was followin' me till I had reached the house, and it was too late then to turn back. If I'd come in when the paper was half over Mrs. Burton would never have forgiven me."

"I don't think it will be over for some time," murmured Pender, who had noted the thickness of the MS., and also the numerous volumes, bristling with white markers, which lay ready on a card-table near the speaker. "We're going to have extracts."

Miss Ronayne stared at the books. "Is she goin' to read them *all*, do you think?" she demanded in a rich *sotto voce* that perilously approached her natural tones.

A timid "Ssh!" sounded from the corner where the Canon sat. It was reinforced by a glance from Cousin Nellie herself, who, in black satin, with her face liberally powdered, looked more dumpy and bunchy than usual. At the same time she looked thoroughly in earnest, and it was only an incongruous levity that made Pender think of Lewis Carroll's poem :—

> "Little birds are writing
> Interesting books,
> To be read by cooks ;—
> Read, I say, not roasted ;
> Letterpress, when toasted,
> Loses its good looks."

"What impertinence!" said Miss Ronayne, alluding to the "Ssh." "She hasn't even begun yet."

But Pender, who had caught the "cook's" glance, did not reply. He hoped Miss Ronayne would stop talking, for the Canon, too, had a dull, fishy eye fixed upon them, while the other wandered vaguely in space.

The paper began. It had proceeded, indeed, as far as the first extract, when, in the brief pause necessitated by Cousin Nellie's having to find the place in one of her books, a muffled thump was audible on the lower panel of the door. The thump was followed by what sounded to Pender suspiciously like a rattle of claws.

He turned to Miss Ronayne, and she had heard it, too. "Heavens!" she hissed in his ear. "They've let him out!"

Several people looked at the door, but nobody moved, and Pender made a sign across the room to Trefusis. The extract was found, and Mrs. Burton began to read. Then a second and more peremptory thump was struck upon the door. Everybody now gazed expectantly in that direction except Mrs. Burton, who continued to read, while Trefusis tiptoed down the room. He turned the handle gently, and Tim entered, his head slightly on one side as he looked round for his mistress.

Mrs. Burton paused, stiffening all over, a frozen smile upon her lips. Captain Chaffinch at the same time burst into a guffaw of laughter.

It was tactless, perhaps, but it at least gave Miss Ronayne a chance to apologise, of which she availed herself, though in a manner far too breezy, Pender felt, to carry conviction. "They must have let him out of the kitchen," she bawled at the top of her voice. "He followed me here without my knowin' it. Lie down, Tim, now, and don't you even *think* of interruptin' again."

An embarrassed maid appeared next, to explain what had happened. Tim had been "very kind" to her at first, but presently growing tired of being kind had insisted on visiting the drawing-room. Meanwhile the culprit, after a preliminary sniff or two, and an unsuccessful attempt to climb into an already occupied chair, flung himself heavily on the carpet, and Mrs. Burton, visions of the mangled though now convalescent Wopsey floating before her, continued to read. She

analysed the faith of Robert Louis Stevenson ; she gave illustrations of it ; she read more extracts, including several of the prayers ; and the snores of Tim, who was not even asleep, but merely drowsy, merely trying to create an atmosphere conducive to slumber, competed triumphantly with the illustrations and the extracts.

Pender was struck by the air of suppressed enjoyment reflected in every countenance except the Canon's, Norah's, and Miss Foy's. Mrs. O'Clery looked positively radiant, and he could see her, when Tim brought out a louder snore than usual, exchanging a meaning glance across the room with anybody whose attention she could catch. A strong suspicion was borne in upon him that " The Faith of Robert Louis Stevenson " was giving a pleasure to the Literary Society such as it is the fortune of very few papers to give. Tim was at this moment, he felt convinced, by far the most popular person in the room, while Miss Tonie Ronayne was an easy second. Reluctantly he arrived at these conclusions, which so reflected on Cousin Nellie's popularity. What had she done to them all—poor Cousin Nellie ? The paper ended amid applause.

" I suppose the woman's foamin' at the mouth," observed Miss Ronayne tranquilly, quite heedless of the fact that Pender was a relation, and was shortly to become a son-in-law. " I'm not goin' near her, at any rate. As if I could help Tim snorin'. Personally I think it's rather soothin' than otherwise."

" I doubt if it has soothed Cousin Nellie," Pender murmured.

And then Professor Heron rose, looking, with his bright eyes and flowing white beard, very like God. After several highly complimentary remarks, and a confession that he had not himself read Robert Louis Stevenson, he declared the paper to be open for discussion, and sat down.

The usual pause ensued. Nobody spoke except Captain Chaffinch, who was passionately and minutely describing to Miss Ethel Richardson a game of golf he

had played that afternoon and lost only by a bad drive after a tie at the eighteenth. As the Captain grew more and more dramatic, and more and more oblivious to his surroundings, the whole room was very soon listening to him. Colonel Richardson was irresistibly reminded of how he too had once lost an important match in similar circumstances. But in his case he had made a perfectly straight clean drive over some trees. "There was nowhere, dash it, for the ball to *be* lost. An absolutely open stretch of short turf, and not a man, woman, or child in sight—not so much as a *daisy*. Yet the ball was gone. Hunted everywhere. Not a sign of it. And it turned out afterwards a confounded dog had lifted it and run off with it in his mouth. A small boy saw him do it. You'd hardly believe it. The brute was *trained* to steal balls. His master made a regular trade of it. . . ." A general cross-fire of anecdote followed the Colonel's reminiscence, in which the faith, and even the name of Robert Louis Stevenson were forgotten.

Mrs. Burton, aloof, still clasping her manuscript, sat waiting for the storm to subside, when Pender, who knew it never *would* subside, went to congratulate her. He found her offended—which was hardly to be marvelled at. It was largely Professor Heron's fault, she seemed to think: he should have called people to order; but Professor Heron in the chair was hopeless. Pender produced his congratulations with an astonishing fluency, and Mrs. Burton was sufficiently mollified to declare that he, Rex, had always reminded her of Robert Louis Stevenson.

The remark, for some reason, filled him with alarm, and immediately he expressed a not quite genuine distaste for Stevensonian romance. "*The Ebb-Tide*, for instance—rather thin, don't you think, after Conrad?"

"I didn't mean the writer; I meant the *man*," said Cousin Nellie softly. "I have been re-reading his letters. He must have been extremely lovable."

"Yes—eh—I suppose so," Pender hurriedly replied.

Fortunately, Cousin Nellie did not pursue the comparison further. "Where have you been hiding yourself lately?" she demanded. "You might as well not be living here for all the good we get of you. You're like one of those hermits who used to live in the desert. If we want you we have to make a pilgrimage to your cave, or your cell, or whatever it is."

"Oh, I'm hardly so bad as that, am I?" Pender objected feebly, though as a matter of fact he felt more guilty than Cousin Nellie imagined. "I really *have* been very busy lately."

"I know. You're writing a book. Theodore told me. I always thought you'd write a book some day."

Pender smiled uneasily. But it was his own fault; he might have known the Canon would babble. He produced a vague deprecation of Cousin Nellie's charge, which she easily swept aside. "I'm coming one of these mornings to hear the first chapters. I give you notice beforehand so that you may be ready."

He laughed—again uneasily. It struck him in fact as exactly the sort of thing she *would* do, for her curiosity was unbounded. At the same time he saw Captain Chaffinch approaching, and raised his finger significantly to his lips.

"Rippin' paper, Mrs. Burton," the Captain declared. "Intellectual treat. Enjoyed it awfully. Of course, literchure's not much in my line, but it showed Stevenson in such a new light, and all that." Having expressed this appreciation, he produced a pocket-book as if he were about to demand an autograph. "We've just been discussin' the tournament. What with the price of tennis balls and everythin' else at present, the expenses are bound to be pretty heavy this year. We're tryin' to get people to double their pre-war subscriptions, and so far nobody has objected. It's the only thing we can do, you see."

"Of course," Mrs. Burton agreed effusively. "And I'm so glad the others have promised, because I was

thinking of reducing *my* poor little subscription. I was afraid to say so, but now that you'll be getting so much from——"

Pender turned discreetly away, leaving the Captain to lose his own battles. He glanced round the room in search of Norah, but she was over by the piano, talking to Charlie Gore, who was evidently trying to persuade her to play something. Then he saw Miss Foy seated all alone in the bow window. He wanted to speak to Miss Foy, and he might as well do so now. He crossed the room and sat down beside her, just as Norah struck the first resounding chord.

Under cover of the music, which he knew by experience would be of a kind favourable to confidential conversation, Pender broached a subject that for several days back had been in his mind. He knew he must be careful, but at the same time decided there was no use beating about the bush.

"I hear you've had an offer for your house, Miss Foy. Dr. Olphert told me."

Miss Foy glanced quickly at Dr. Olphert, who had just arrived, and was standing, large and black and bearded, by the door. She coloured. "Yes," she replied, drawing back a little with a timid yet discouraging air of reserve. "The people want immediate possession, however—which of course makes it impossible. . . . Have you been keeping well, Mr. Pender?"

Pender realised that the subject had been changed, but he was not to be put off so easily. "Oh, I'd be all right if I'd somebody to look after me," he declared. "Why can't you give them possession?"

Miss Foy plucked at her dress. Pender was prepared for a further snub, but she only said nervously, "I shall have to find rooms before I can move out, and it is very difficult at this time of year."

He leaned towards her over the back of his chair. "There are plenty of rooms at Ramoan. I wish you would come there. Then you wouldn't have to bother any more."

Miss Foy's colour deepened, and a startled expression came into her face. Her hand trembled as she hastily straightened her glasses. In her faded, dowdy evening dress, looking so faded and dowdy herself, she seemed to shrink back farther and farther into the protective shadow behind her. "Thank you very much, Mr. Pender," she replied in a shaky voice, "but of course it would be—quite out of the question."

He answered quietly: "Only if you settle it that way. It seems to me it would be very much *in* the question if you didn't. . . . Your rooms—whichever you chose—would be absolutely your own. There is a piano for your pupils, if you want to go on teaching: plenty of room for your own piano, if you prefer it. The only drawback would be my company at meals, and that sort of thing."

Miss Foy did not look at him. "It's very kind of you, Mr. Pender. I'm very grateful to you, but really you must see yourself—that it would be quite impossible."

Pender shrugged his shoulders. "I thought you'd say so; but I don't see anything of the sort. . . . Honestly, I'll be immensely pleased if you come. Why, then, shouldn't you?"

"But——"

"Send off a wire to the people who want your house, telling them they can have it."

Miss Foy looked at him now; she gazed at him through glasses which in her agitation had again grown crooked.

"You like the place, don't you?" Pender went on persuasively. "It's not bad in summer anyhow."

"I know your suggestion is prompted by the greatest kindness, Mr. Pender, and I am really most grateful for it——"

"But it isn't," Pender interrupted. "You may make your mind easy on that score. My suggestion is prompted by selfishness, as anybody but you would see at once. If it wasn't, I shouldn't make it. No

arrangement which isn't based on a decent foundation of mutual selfishness is in the least likely to be satisfactory."

Miss Foy listened to these words without comprehending them. She was indeed not very capable of comprehending anything just then. She was deeply moved, and she knew she must defer her answer until she had leisure to look at the whole thing calmly. For she felt a strong temptation to accept, and she knew this would be wrong. If it were not for what people would think and say; if it were not for—she hardly knew what—how easy it would be to accept. . . . She had always liked Mr. Pender, and she now liked him more than she had ever liked anybody. Not one of her old friends had volunteered to come to her rescue. Of course they did not know things were so serious as they really were. She would have left Ballycastle in the dead of night rather than have told them. They did not even know about the offer for her house. Only Dr. Olphert knew that. But Mr. Pender had guessed, and Miss Foy was perfectly aware that people never guess unless they want to. She felt herself trembling. It would mean so much, and she was so tired of teaching. Still she held out; still she did not think it would do. Was there not there, directly facing her, the greatest objection of all, incarnate in the black-satined figure of Mrs. Burton, with her yellow fuzzy hair, and little, pink blobby nose, at which she was dabbing this moment with a lace pocket-handkerchief?

"Will you promise to think it over?" Pender persisted. "Really think it over. Why not consult Dr. Olphert?"

Norah's music had ceased, and, with a sense that they had now done their duty, a determined movement was being made by the larger portion of the audience to pull into prominence the little green tables which had been unobtrusively waiting in the background all evening. Miss Tonie Ronayne and Captain Chaffinch were particularly active in this movement, and in the

general mix-up that followed, it was impossible for Pender and Miss Foy to prolong their *tête-à-tête*. Miss Foy on the whole was glad they could not do so, even though her intuition told her she would be placed at the table where the Canon was already seated, waiting for three other duffers. Miss Ronayne had gathered together her own four, which consisted of herself, Mrs. O'Clery, Captain Chaffinch, and Dr. Olphert. It was wonderful how she had managed it, for apparently Professor Heron was arranging the tables. Miss Foy would much rather not have played at all. She knew she would not be able to concentrate her mind on the game, and she was not very good even when she *did* concentrate. Mr. Pender had given her so much to think about. She followed his movements with soft, dim old eyes, before taking off her glasses, surreptitiously to wipe them. She would not be able to accept his offer of course, but even his having made it made a difference. It was as if a flash of summer, with all its accompaniment of leaf and flower and eager life and winged music, had burst for a moment or two upon her colourless and desert world.

II

It was close on twelve o'clock when the small party broke up. They came out into a brilliant summer night. A white moon hung over the sea, and far away, from an invisible island, a lighthouse winked rhythmically.

Pender was with the Burtons. The Canon and his wife walked on ahead, but Rex and Norah paused by the sea wall, and very soon found themselves alone. The voices of the receding party, particularly Mrs. O'Clery's voice, rose to them for a few moments, then gradually grew fainter, till presently all sound died away except the heavy beat and backwash of the waves.

"Let's climb a little higher," Pender suggested.

The beauty of this lunary world had suddenly caught him in its net. It had awakened a strange, excited sense of unearthly things. Dim, ancestral superstitions glimmered in his mind, as if the moonlight, penetrating there, had discovered them, like glittering silver dust at the bottom of a well.

Norah, a little reluctantly perhaps, consented. She had been playing golf all day, and was no doubt quite ready to go home, but they climbed to the top of the hill and crossed a rough open field, bounded on the coastline by a wall of uncemented stones. Here they stood at the cliff's extreme edge. Away on the left, the white chalky rocks of Kenbane ran out into the dark water; on the right, the black shape of Fair Head, huge in its sullen shadow, loomed against the sky; and on the right also, and far below where these two solitary human figures stood, was the pallid crescent of the beach, with its long, thin line of breaking foam. And these things seemed to have life—a strange and fabulous life. Fair Head was like a crouching, dark

Chimera—brooding, slowly awakening—an immense spiritual force reaching out to engorge, to destroy.

But Pender did not communicate these fantasies to his companion. He did not, indeed, communicate anything. She had moved a little away from him, and her body, as she stood facing the sea, was clearly outlined in the moonlight, strong, lissom, and slender. Something statuesque in her poised immobility, in the buoyant grace of her form, in a sort of virginal freshness and purity it suggested, made him again think of Diana—Diana the huntress—Diana with her moonshine, making beautiful yet dangerous this high, lonely place. Alas! he was no Endymion, no eager boy. Rather was he a somewhat eccentric and valetudinarian person, little likely to arouse emotion in a goddess, or even in a mortal maiden. He wondered why she had left him, but he took no step to follow her, and it was she herself who after a few minutes rejoined him of her own accord. They still kept silence. He could not guess of what she was thinking, but he was certain it was neither of the scene before her nor of him. It might be of the approaching tournament: it was something, at all events, equally enthralling. A horribly elderly reflection that he had better not catch cold prompted him to interrupt her reverie by proposing that they should go back again to the road.

She immediately assented. They walked side by side, and he was struck again by her unconscious muteness, just as, watching her across the card-table that evening, he had been struck by the abstraction of her expression. She had appeared to him then to be utterly uninterested in the present moment and its happenings. Yet as a rule she was interested; as a rule, he would have said, she was interested in little else. All that night, however, her mind had seemed to be turned inward upon some secret and absorbing vision, the nature of which, he had felt, would never to him be revealed.

And as he looked at her now, sidelong, he felt this

more and more. In the pure, chiselled outline of that coldly beautiful profile there seemed to be indicated a superb strength of will—latent, intensely quiet, yet intensely there. She gave him, somehow, the impression of being admirably equipped for life—mentally and physically. She was the perfection of a type—fine, strong, clean in every nerve and cell. From whom, he wondered, did she get these qualities? Not from the wool-gathering Canon, not from Cousin Nellie; they must reach back to a more remote generation. She was admirable, and his admiration for her was sincere—so sincere that it suddenly flashed upon him as incredible that she should see in him even a passable mate. He remembered the letter he had got from Cousin Nellie in hospital. There was perhaps no particular reason why he should remember it just now, but he did so; and a vague doubt floated into his mind. Suppose the whole thing were based on—a lie. It was a withering thought; but the astonishing insubstantiality of his entire relation to her startled him, and he had a curious feeling that it could not possibly go on.

"Norah!" he said.

She turned to him as if startled too, but with a quick smile. Her whole face altered: a light that had been in it went out: she was once more practical and commonplace.

"I want to ask you something," he blundered. "I want——"

"Yes?"

Her smile deepened, but it was the smile one gives to an intelligent and serious child, and it suddenly awoke in him a bitter resentment. "Did you *really* want me to come back?" he asked abruptly. "Did you *really* care?"

He did not look at her for a moment, and then suddenly he looked. She was half facing him, with her smile still unchanged, in her eyes nothing except an impenetrable calm, a perfect frankness and friendliness.

"What an extraordinary question!" she said. "Rex, dear, I'm afraid I don't understand you a bit. Of course I wanted you."

But she had grown more serious, and her voice dropped a little with an effect of increased and graver sweetness as she spoke the last words. She passed her arm through his, and her hand closed firmly upon his hand.

"Then you—you *do* care for me?" he faltered, while a strange chill of fear passed like a wintry breath into his heart.

"Yes, I do care for you," she said.

"Care enough to marry me?"

"Enough even for that."

He turned to her, and as he did so she stopped short. Suddenly she put her two hands on his shoulders and laughed.

"You don't seem to believe me," she challenged him, half playfully, half sadly. "Is it so inconceivable that any one should care for you? I can't imagine anybody *not* doing so. Now then, is that enough, or is your conceit still unsatisfied? I think it would be much nicer if you said these things to *me*, instead of the other way about."

His answering smile was very dim. "And you're sure that—that you're perfectly happy?"

"I'm sure that I'm perfectly happy."

She moved her head slightly, so that his kiss came upon her cheek. Then she kissed him in return.

But there was no meaning in that kiss, none on either side. It was languid, half unconscious. It was as if the coldness of the moon had entered into it, the coldness of the sea. It was a compact sealed, but it was no more than that. It left Pender just where he had been before; still doubtful, still uneasy, still mystified. But the fatal passivity, from which by an effort he had aroused himself for a moment, was already flowing back upon him, drugging him, lulling him,

drowning the warning voices that had broken through his dream.

And he felt neither elated nor depressed, but only curiously lethargic towards the whole matter, when, after he had left her, he walked on home alone. He felt that he was still engaged, but very little else. He had no reason for doubting that Norah cared for him : he never *had* had any real reason, he told himself. It was merely, as he summed it up once again, that she did not seem to realise that there *could* be another feeling, more passionate, more blinding, more rapturous than this humdrum and cousinly attachment which was what bound them to each other, which was all even their kiss had borne witness to. Was there not something indeed in the very quality of that kiss, in the instinctive turning of her head so that he might kiss her cheek, which proved it better than anything else could have ? He quickened his pace unconsciously, hurrying, as if away from it all, along the moon-washed road.

III

"There were two loves, and one made white
Thy singing lips and golden hair. . . ."
ANDREW LANG.

As he drew near to the house he felt its mysterious call. More and more he was becoming unwilling to give up his evenings to anything but this task he had set himself. He was eager to resume it now, for he kept, though no one knew it, recklessly late hours, working through the darkness, the cold twilight of dawn, and the brightness of early morning—only the fear of being disturbed by one of the servants driving him at last to bed.

Not that he always worked. He sometimes sat without putting pen to paper, though how long these fits of abstraction lasted he had little means of judging. Often he awoke from them with a strange sense that he had not been idle ; more than once he had awakened literally, his mind still full of the coloured, broken fragments of a dream which he tried, at first in vain, but latterly more and more successfully, to piece together.

The scheme of his memoir had utterly changed. He saw it now in the light of something in which his imagination could find free play. It was all, no doubt, still to be largely a matter of delicacy and tact and sympathy, but it was exactly what was *not* in his notes, what was *not* in his letters, that somehow shaped itself on the paper before him.

And not only his work, but the very room itself in which he wrote, was beginning to exercise an ambiguous fascination upon him. It seemed indescribably different from every other place. As he stood upon the threshold before entering he would feel a thrill of

expectancy. There was a moment then, during which the impression of life was unmistakable—of a life which had been going on during his absence. Closing the door behind him, it was as if he were actually passing from one world to another; the awaiting atmosphere swallowed him instantly, lapped about him, cut him off from what he had just left outside; and his senses, his nerves, stretched out delicate antennæ in this warm, grateful air, as a seaweed that has been washed up on the rocks spreads out its branches, takes new colour and life and beauty, when the sea once more submerges it. The slightest repulse, the slightest feeling of unfriendliness in his surroundings, would, he knew, have brought him up sharply, as at the cry of "check." Had he ever become conscious of *that*, he could only have closed the door and retreated softly on tiptoe. But always a spirit of welcome was there, a ghostly emanation, positive, unequivocal. At whatever hour he had come he had felt it, and with this there had dawned in him of late a vague reluctance to admit anybody else. It was—this last impulse—quite irrational; he had determined not to yield to it; nevertheless, to-night, he experienced a sharp disappointment when, on opening the door, he discovered Dr. Olphert sitting waiting for him, amid a cloud of smoke, which he was puffing from a short, squat pipe.

"So you've come at last. And now, I suppose, you want to go to bed: at any rate that's what you *should* do."

"I never want to go to bed," Pender replied, still standing motionless on the threshold. He watched the Doctor oddly for a few seconds; then entered the room and crossed over to the fireplace. There he again stood in silence, while Olphert looked at him lazily, but made no attempt to break in upon his meditation. The Doctor must, Pender reflected, have been sitting here alone for nearly an hour. Plenty of time therefore—plenty of time for the room to assert its influence. The temptation to ask a question was

strong, but he resisted it. Olphert, he knew, would admit nothing, very likely had little to admit. For with the first faint stirring in the atmosphere about him, with the first stirring of that secret life, he would be up in arms against it. He would fight it down; he would oppose to it a barrier of stubborn scepticism; he would open a book, or perhaps step out into the garden; even if Roxana herself floated gently down from her picture and stood before him he would stare stonily in another direction. A question would be useless.

"I have asked Miss Foy to come and live here," he said abruptly.

Olphert smoked on. "I see," was all he answered. But a minute or two later he said, without removing his pipe from his mouth, "She refused, of course?"

Pender had begun a restless pacing of the room, and he wheeled round quickly. "She didn't refuse. She is thinking it over. Why should she refuse?"

"My dear fellow, there are several reasons why she should refuse—if she cares to produce them. It would be better to admit that sensibly at the outset, and decide what they are worth."

"There are plenty of reasons why she should accept. . . . I want you to point them out to her."

"I shall be happy to do so if——"

"If what?" asked Pender, advancing again to the fireplace.

"Well, I don't even see how you can be very sure about it yourself."

Pender sat down. There was a slight frown on his face.

"Have you consulted Miss Burton, or Mrs. Burton?" Olphert continued stolidly.

"I intend to tell Norah to-morrow."

"Ah—you've put it off till to-morrow. I think that was a mistake. I mean, so much depends, doesn't it, on what *they* happen to think of the idea? If they

don't approve of it there's no use in my advising Miss Foy to come."

"What possible objection——"

The Doctor's glance rested upon him with a certain speculative curiosity. It struck him that Pender's nerves were a little on edge. "When are you to be married?" he asked.

"I don't know."

"You *are* going to be married, aren't you?"

Pender flushed. "What do you mean? You say things sometimes——"

Olphert regarded him calmly. "Until to-night you haven't grumbled at what I say. I'm quite aware that it's frequently in very bad taste."

"I don't want you to be—absurd," Pender muttered.

"Very well then. But if I'm not to be absurd I must tell you that I haven't much faith in your engagement. If it were to anybody but Norah Burton! I take it that it is to be a marriage of convenience."

"I really think you had better stop," Pender interrupted.

Olphert shrugged his shoulders. "Just as you please. It is hardly my fault, you know, if I can't imagine you as married." Then, as to this last speech Pender made no answer, "You probably fancy that because you like to shut yourself up here in this room you're a paragon of domestication. But you're not: you're about as indifferent to everything marriage means, or ought to mean, as any man I ever met."

"Are you bent on discussing my marriage?" Pender asked coldly.

"No, it takes two to conduct a discussion. I was bent, however, on saying just so much as I have said. We can now turn to pleasanter things. How is the memoir getting on? You seem to have written a good deal, if that is your manuscript on the table."

Pender cast a quick glance at the heap of paper. He felt that he ought to be angry with Olphert; but he was not. "Yes. . . ." he said: then added after

a moment, " Some of it I shall leave out—some of what I wrote at first."

" Then you've nearly finished ? "

" Nearly finished ? I've only begun. It has altered a good deal—the whole thing—since I talked to you about it last."

" Altered ? "

" I told you of Trefusis's discovery." He got up and unlocked a drawer from which he took a flat leather case. He opened this and gave it to Olphert in silence.

Olphert examined it. He looked up from the miniature to the framed drawing on the wall. " They are rather different, aren't they ? " he said.

" The miniature is better," Pender replied simply. " It is more like Tom Firbis as he really was. The drawing has been too much touched up and toned down—idealised and emasculated. It is too—— He may have looked like that now and then, but as a rule there was a good deal more animation in his face."

Olphert snapped the case and handed it back. There was in Pender's manner a complete absence of self-consciousness, otherwise he might have suspected a certain affectation in this description of a person he had never seen. " How do you know what Tom Firbis was like ? " he asked quietly.

" Of course I don't really know."

He sat there dreaming—dreaming for a long time—in his eyes a curious glowing light that the Doctor recognised uneasily. He got up to mix himself a drink, and as he did so heard Pender say, " I should like to read you what I have written. Not to-night : it is too late, I suppose : but some other night. I should like to know how it strikes you. You will see then what I mean about its having altered. I told you I had begun it as a sort of family history—a sort of expansion and shaping of my grandfather's notes, with quotations from old letters. I intended to get a few copies privately printed, but nothing more than that.

That's why I should like your opinion—now: the thing has developed so much."

Olphert returned to his chair.

"But it is still a family memoir, isn't it?"

"No, it isn't. At least, it's not like other memoirs. I have reported all kinds of things for which I have no producible evidence." His glance met Olphert's with what seemed to the latter a mingled reservation and appeal. It was as if he were weighing carefully the exact amount of faith he might count upon, though the purport of such a precaution—if it were a precaution—was not easy to follow. The Doctor, at all events, made no attempt to follow it.

"Isn't that rather dangerous?" he merely suggested. "If it is to be neither biography nor fiction I don't very well see what it *can* be."

"Why not? Surely there was a good deal of fiction in Plato's Socrates? Yet it is a better portrait than Xenophon's. It is alive. I only want to create life—a fragment of life. You will understand when I read it to you."

"I understand more or less now. It is principally your attitude towards it that I don't understand. I mean, I don't see why you should adopt an attitude at all; much less this distinctly cabalistic one."

"My attitude is that of a watcher, a listener, a recorder."

"Yes, but a listener must listen to something; a watcher must watch something. It sounds, the way you put it, as if you were collaborating with a ghost—'that affable, familiar ghost which nightly gulls him with intelligence.'"

Pender, his head leaning against the dark back of the chair, did not deny the charge. His lean, worn face, viewed in the lamplight, seemed itself slightly ghostly.

"What time do you go to bed?" asked Olphert abruptly. "If I were you I shouldn't write after ten o'clock."

"I get up very late," Pender said.

"Why not change your working hours? Why not write in the mornings?"

"I couldn't."

Olphert's gold spectacles glittered at him in a scrutiny that was frankly professional. "That's nonsense," he returned. "It's only a matter of habit, and we can form any habits we like—even good ones."

"In the morning there would be nothing there."

"You would be there: that is all that is ever there."

"In the morning nothing would happen."

"What do you want to happen?"

"The next scene in the drama. Until that takes place I can do nothing."

"I'm afraid I *don't* understand—after all," Olphert dropped half irritably.

But Pender's eyes were perfectly candid—with the strange, grave candour of a child sharing its secret. "I simply sit in a dark, empty auditorium," he said; "sit before a lowered curtain."

"And if it should remain lowered?"

"Why then, as I told you, nothing would happen. I should merely have to go home—or in other words, to bed. . . . But it doesn't remain lowered. Sooner or later it is drawn up. You appear to be rather incredulous, but it is really exactly as if I were seated in some dark, empty theatre, listening to voices coming through the silence, watching, by uncertain lighting, figures moving across a stage. The light is vivid enough while it lasts, but it is directed only on a small portion of the stage, and all the rest is darkness."

"And you actually believe that you watch something?"

Pender hesitated. "Words like 'watch,' 'listen,' are too emphatic. It isn't a matter of keeping one's eyes and ears open. I am *attentive*—that is all."

"Then you haven't seen, you haven't heard," Olphert claimed, but Pender seemed unconscious of, or indifferent to, his interruption. He seemed to be elaborating, by little touches, a hypothesis that might satisfy

his own intelligence. "I have an idea that the thing is gradually working outward," he at length produced. "It is working slowly out, like damp upon a wall."

"But up to the present it hasn't *come* out?"

Pender looked at him. "Once only," he said. "It was last night. I had stopped writing and was simply sitting there where you are sitting now. I wasn't expecting anything to happen: I had no premonitory sensations whatever—either physical or mental. I merely became conscious that two other people were in the room with me. There was nothing ghostly, nothing misty, nothing extraordinary, either in my own feelings or in my surroundings: I happened to be there when *they* were there—that was all. She—Roxana—was sitting before the fireplace. Over there, nearer the centre of the room, a very young man was also sitting. He was playing the fiddle. What he played was unknown to me. I have, too, unfortunately forgotten it, so we shall get nothing from that."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean that if he had been playing an air I could recognise as having been written *since* that time—why, then, of course, he couldn't have been playing at all, could he?"

"I see. . . . Not unless he had managed to learn it later—in whatever questionable abode he may inhabit now."

"Roxana was not looking at him: she was slightly turned away from him. But I looked at him, and his face was white—dead white; and his hair was red—flaming, wonderful—like a red-gold fire. As he played his gaze was fastened intently upon Roxana. This lasted for some time: I can't say how long. Then I heard a noise of a door opening and closing: I rather think it was the dining-room door. Roxana heard it too, for she raised her eyes and stared straight through me at the door of *this* room. There was an amazing expression upon her face—a look of something much more than irritation. As for young Tom, he simply

went on playing. But a peculiar smile flickered at the corners of his lips, and his playing altered. It seemed to me to take on a half-mocking, half-malicious quality. I heard the sound of a heavy footstep drawing closer. Then the handle of the door turned, and with that everything went out—puff—like a lamp or a candle. It was only when the whole thing was over that I felt a vague, spiritual shock—the kind of shock which I suppose must always accompany any first experience of the definitely supernormal."

"And you have no feeling of having simply wakened up?"

"If I had, there wouldn't be anything to tell, would there? But the oddest thing about it is that I somehow don't seem to have been there—for them. When Roxana looked at me she didn't see me: she looked straight through me: she looked at the door, which was exactly behind my chair, as it is now behind yours. . . . She was extraordinarily attractive," Pender added in a low voice—slowly. "I have never seen any other woman like her."

IV

NEXT morning Pender had barely lounged into his study and shut the door behind him when Norah opened it.

She first pushed it very cautiously and peeped in; then flung it wide. "I thought I'd surprise you," she cried gaily. "I wanted to catch you at work, like a real live author, and make you read some of your book to me, and now of course I find you doing nothing. I believe you're an impostor, and that the book is a myth invented simply to give you an excuse for avoiding your neighbours."

"I'm afraid I've only just finished breakfast," Pender apologised. "But it was delightful of you to come so early."

She stopped short, half-way across the room. "Now I wonder what you mean by *that* tactful speech," she said. "If it really was early I should know; but I didn't leave the house till half-past eleven, and it must be nearly twelve now. I suppose I shall be thanked next for coming so often, though it is the first time I've even dared to peep into this room."

Pender smiled at her lazily. She struck him as more animated and vivid than he had ever seen her, and immediately afterwards, though quite unconsciously, he looked up at Roxana's portrait hanging above the chimney-piece.

"That is your own fault," he said. "The room is always here."

"Yes, I know; and you're usually here too, for that matter; it is only the invitation that is lacking. I'd like to see your face if I began to drop in casually at unexpected hours. You'd love it, wouldn't you?" She turned to him suddenly with a laugh—cajoling, appealing: her whole expression suggested a kind of restless happiness—or perhaps only excitement: she

seemed to be in the highest possible spirits, and yet behind it all there was something else, something deeper and less penetrable. "I'd better confess why I *did* disturb you, Rex. I know you'll call me a faithless creature, but I'm not going to meet you after lunch as we arranged. Do you mind? It's the fault of this wretched tennis-tournament. My partner wants me to practise with him. He's just arrived—unexpectedly—and we need all the practice we can get."

"I didn't know you *had* a partner," Pender returned absently.

"Did you think I was going to shine only in singles, then?"

"No, of course not. I mean, I thought your partner would be Charlie Gore, or somebody, here on the spot."

"That, dear, at least can't have been for want of telling. Charlie Gore is playing with Ethel. My partner is George Best. He wrote to me three or four days ago to ask me to enter with him. I told you all about it at the time, but you never listen; you're so busy thinking of more important things."

She laughed at him from where she had momentarily poised herself, on the arm of one of the chairs, yet she had still, through all her vivacity, the air, somehow, of coaxing him to forgiveness.

"Who is George Best?" Pender inquired gravely.

"He's your friend Mrs. O'Clery's nephew. I don't suppose you've ever met him, but he's quite a nice boy, and you're going to meet him to-day."

"I don't think it's particularly nice of him to make you forsake *me*."

He was astonished to see her blush deeply, almost painfully, at this extremely feeble speech; but she laughed again, and putting out her hand picked a loose thread from his dressing-gown.

"I'm afraid he's never even heard of you. And I do really need practice—I've been playing nothing but golf for weeks. You're to come down and sit on a seat and watch us, and call out 'Well played!' every

time I hit a ball—which won't be often. Also you're to come back and have tea with us and be good generally."

Pender's eyes were fixed upon her meditatively, half questioningly. He was becoming more and more aware of a subtle transformation which seemed to have taken place in her. It was not his fancy; it impressed him now vividly; and he wondered, with a feeling bordering on compunction, whether it had anything to do with what he had said last night. Not that he had said very much. Only she might have read into it a meaning to which he had been, and still was, blind. Certainly she was different, and the difference lay not only in the increased animation and charm of her voice. Though she had come to put him off, it seemed to him that her manner towards him was warmer, happier, more intimate, more really affectionate than it had been since the first days of their friendship. Beneath its influence he himself was stirred to some measure of responsiveness. "I won't promise to watch you all the time," he said. "In other respects I may perhaps fall in with the revised scheme."

She sprang lightly to her feet. "You're an angel. And now I'm going to look at your room—the mysterious room where the great work is accomplished. Do you mind if I pass remarks? First of all, why have you brought these extraordinary pictures in from the dining-room? Surely you could have found something a little more attractive. This fair lady (I forget her name) is trying to *look* attractive, I know, but she hasn't succeeded, poor thing—or perhaps you think she *has*?"

"She's a distant connection of your own—by marriage," Pender replied.

"So are they all—probably—but even that doesn't make them beautiful, does it? I'm glad she's 'distant,' however; I don't think I want her to be close."

Pender looked down. Absurdly, childishly, he was annoyed by these words, even though he knew they had been thrown out with the utmost carelessness. But he was conscious, strangely, hauntingly, of the

presence of Roxana. The room at this moment was filled with her ; the very air breathed of her, retaining still a faint, ghostly fragrance. And in this delicate, imponderable atmosphere Norah seemed out of place —an intruder, too noisy, too vivacious, offending without willing to offend.

" Why ? " he asked, very quietly.

She just glanced at him, with the merest shrug of her shoulders. " I don't like her : that is all. I detest that simpering, Mona Lisa type. I'm quite convinced, too, they're invariably bad."

She made a mocking face, partly at his gravity, though he imagined he was displaying an elaborate detachment. " But, my dear child, nobody could be *less* like the Mona Lisa. There isn't the least resemblance : they haven't a feature in common : even the colouring—— "

" Very well," Norah hastened to interrupt. " It doesn't matter, does it ? To me they're both odious, but I've no doubt it wasn't the poor things' fault if the artist chose to give them a self-satisfied smirk. Like you, he probably thought it added the last charm to their bewitchingness."

He did not reply, and she turned away from the picture, leaving him still gazing at it.

" You haven't shown me your book yet. I want to see with my own eyes how much you've done. Do you think I'll like it ? "

" No," said Pender slowly. " I'm afraid you won't."

She had found her way to his writing-table, but she now wheeled abruptly round, as if struck by something in his tone.

" Why ? " she asked. " Because I don't admire the portrait ? Do you always know beforehand what people will like ? "

" I don't think I could tell what you'd *like*," Pender distinguished apologetically, " but I believe I could tell what you wouldn't."

" You must be very clever. Only, why should I

dislike it?" she persisted, still with her eyes upon his face.

"I don't know why: there isn't any particular reason why." With his hands in his pockets, he leaned back against the chimney-piece.

"There must be a reason, or you wouldn't have said so. Is it the subject?—or is it my taste, or lack of taste?"

"My dear girl, I hope you'll enjoy it immensely—naturally. I don't *want* you not to like it," he added, with a laugh that sounded faintly uneasy.

"You don't want to read it to me, though, do you?"

Her persistence embarrassed him. "I don't want you to read it until it is finished," he answered evasively. "I don't want anybody to see it till then."

"Not even Dr. Olphert?"

"That is quite different: I have discussed it with him all along. . . . Why, at any rate, should you suddenly show this alarming interest in the thing? You never showed any before."

"I am chiefly interested in your determination that I won't like it," Norah replied. "That *is* rather interesting, you know."

Their eyes met, and for a moment something seemed to pass between them—something rapid, strange, inimical. Next minute she had moved to the open window. "Let us go out into the sunshine," she said. "I'm not quite sure that I like your room either. It has been shut up for too long."

He followed her in silence as she stepped across the sill.

"I always told you it must be damp," she continued, with a smile that was now slightly constrained. "I knew it must be."

"It isn't really. I've never seen a sign of damp."

"It must be. I felt cold all the time I was in there. I wanted to shiver. . . . The whole house is so shut in. I can't imagine why it wasn't built on the top of the hill instead of down in a hollow."

Pender made no answer: the subject did not strike

him as particularly promising. In any case he had that other subject which he felt he ought to broach, though there was just a chance that it might prove less promising still. "I have asked Miss Foy to come to live here," he told her.

Norah's blank astonishment was certainly unfeigned. "To *live* here!" she repeated, with an extraordinary emphasis. "Miss Foy!" There followed a silence, brief but eloquent, before she inquired in a voice utterly expressionless, "For how long—and in what capacity?"

"Permanently. As my guest, of course."

He saw her colour deepen before she turned her head away, and he felt, with an acute disappointment, that she was going to be less generous than he had hoped. His disappointment gradually gave place to an increasing irritation as she walked on without saying another word. He, too, relapsed into silence. He had not expected her to take it like this. If it had been Cousin Nellie, that would have been different; but Norah he had credited with larger views. At the same time a certain obstinacy awoke within him—particularly when he remembered Olphert's sceptical remarks. After all, he was his own master, and could invite whom he chose.

"At any rate, I've asked her," he repeated, flushing in his turn. "I thought you would have understood."

"I do understand," said Norah, quickly recovering herself. "It was merely that—I didn't know things had quite come to such a pass with Miss Foy."

"To what pass?" he asked, a little coldly.

"I mean, I had no idea she was so badly off as—she evidently is."

But these explanations jarred upon Pender almost more than her first reception of his plan. For some reason, he felt as reluctant to touch upon the financial aspect of the matter as Miss Foy herself could have been. "I'm sure I don't know how badly off she is," he answered stiffly.

"And I know how kind it is of you," Norah went on. "It is only that I am—a little surprised."

"Is there any reason why I *shouldn't* have asked her?" he inquired.

"None, dear Rex—not the very slightest, if you want her. It was a quite brilliant idea, and I'm sure she was delighted."

"The question is whether you're delighted," said Pender sulkily.

"Why? What have I to do with it?"

"Oh—if you take it like that——"

"Like what? You didn't ask her to please me, did you? If you did, of course I'm immensely obliged. You and Dr. Olphert concocted the scheme between you, I should think, and I've already said how charming it is. I can't say more than that, can I? The rest, I think, ought to come from Miss Foy."

She suddenly turned away from him, and with alarm and dismay he saw her shoulders quiver, and then begin to heave, though no sound escaped her. But next moment his dismay altered to a quite different emotion, for he discovered she was not crying, but endeavouring to suppress a paroxysm of laughter.

"I shouldn't have thought it was so intensely amusing," he remarked, in accents scrupulously controlled.

"I'm sorry, Rex; I don't want to annoy you," Norah managed to bring out in a kind of gasp. "But you really are, you know, funny."

"Funny? I don't quite see——"

"I know, dear. It's just that that is funny. Almost anybody else *would* see."

"You mean, then, I *oughtn't* to have asked Miss Foy?" Pender said impatiently. "Why can't you tell me plainly what you *do* mean?"

"Because—— Rex, this really *was* Dr. Olphert's idea, wasn't it?"

"It was my own idea," he answered.

"And didn't it even occur to either of you, that no matter what I thought, other people might think it queer?"

"Olphert knew nothing about it, and I don't care a straw what other people think."

"Then, that's all right," Norah assented cheerfully. "Do *you* care?"

She shook her head. "Not a straw either. In fact it will be rather amusing. . . . Only, I shouldn't have liked it if it had come from Dr. Olphert."

"Everything seems amusing," Pender retorted from a kind of gloomy remoteness. He paced moodily beside her, wishing she had not mentioned Olphert, for he remembered how, on entering his room last night, on seeing the Doctor sitting there waiting for him, the whole thing had suddenly revealed itself as having indeed been suggested by him.

"You're not offended, are you?" Norah asked softly; and she paused, holding out her hand, as if to say good-bye.

"No," he answered, "I'm not offended."

"But you look it, dear—so much." She gazed at him ruefully, yet still with an inextinguishable light dancing in the depths of her eyes. "I couldn't help it—really. I expect it was hysterical."

"Couldn't help what?" he asked.

"Laughing."

He returned her gaze, still suspiciously, though the shadow had cleared from his face. "Is that ingenious explanation meant to comfort me? I don't think you'd ever become hysterical in any circumstances. But then—I'm probably mistaken about a good many things." He turned away for a moment before adding, "You don't tell me very much, you know."

"What about? What don't I tell you?"

Pender plucked a leaf from the hedge. "About yourself," he answered.

"I should have thought you knew."

"I once thought so too—but now I seem to know so little about anything. . . . And—you *have* changed."

She coloured slightly. "Yes, I've changed. You rather harp, though, on this idea of 'change,' don't you? Change and decay in all around I see. I've grown older: you couldn't expect me to remain twenty for ever. . . . But I've not changed nearly so much

as I think you think," she went on quietly. "It is only that I told you even less then, and you were quite satisfied with that—or rather quite satisfied with the imaginary person you created from it."

He did not speak for a few seconds: then he said, "I fancy your mother had better be told: she may think it queer, too."

There was something, perhaps, even "queerer" in this abrupt dropping of the subject, but Norah showed no sign of being aware of it. "About Miss Foy?" she said.

"Shall I tell her, or will you?"

"I think you had better leave it to me, though till you are sure she is coming I don't think either of us need tell her."

Pender left it there. He looked down at the narrow coppice below them, with its hazel-trees hiding a splashing, swift-running stream. "I should have spoken to you—I see now—first—before asking Miss Foy. . . . That would have been the proper thing to do, and I don't know why I didn't do it, except that the opportunity suddenly arose. Will you forgive me?"

"There is nothing to forgive," Norah replied.

"There is. It must have seemed to you a—slight. But believe me, it was unintentional."

"I know—I know. I never thought anything else. . . . Besides—won't there be so many far more serious things to forgive—on both sides—before all is over? Hadn't we better, I mean, establish a kind of permanent contract to take everything—as it comes—as—as inevitable? I should like you to forgive *me*, for instance, in advance. . . ."

"I do."

She looked at him a moment, then suddenly smiled. "And now, I really must go. You won't forget about this afternoon?"

"No."

"Well then—three o'clock, remember. And if you're late don't bother calling for me, but come straight on to the club."

PART VI

FÊTES CHAMPÊTRES

I

THE sea lay blue and dark under the August sunlight. On the long stretch of deserted beach the waves broke with a sleepy, afternoon plash. The banks above the sunken tennis-courts were dotted with people, who moved about, or sat upon the grass, or on the few seats provided—all talking of and watching the progress of the tournament.

Pender, too, had come to watch, and if necessary make himself agreeable, but he looked carefully round before choosing his seat. Below him, among the players though not now playing, he saw Norah and George Best. He liked George Best. George Best had a sunburnt, boyish, pleasant face, and he was refreshingly simple. One talked to him about bats and balls, or, if compelled to, about politics—English or Irish. George, in spite of youth and a modest unaffected manner, knew exactly how to run both countries. He also knew about Labour Agitators, Bolshevists, Sinn Feiners, and people of "that sort." According to George an astonishing number of persons were either Bolshevists or Sinn Feiners (it was practically the same thing): he seemed to be able to recognise them at first sight by extraordinary signs, such as the length of their hair, the shape of their hats—even their boots. . . .

Pender perceived Cousin Nellie, but he was not going to sit beside *her*. He turned his back at once in case she should make a signal that it might be difficult

to misinterpret, and a few yards away he observed the Canon chatting with Miss Tonie Ronayne. He hesitated. Miss Ronayne, having been put out yesterday in the first round of everything, was to-day accompanied by Tim. The Canon was talking to Tim —rather hollowly, Pender fancied—and he was enlivening his conversation by making playful snaps with his fingers. "Tim! Good dog! . . . How intelligent they are! One almost expects them to speak."

But Tim, looking singularly morose in Pender's opinion, did not respond to these advances. He obviously disliked crowds; and indeed, at that moment, with Miss Ronayne's large, gloved hand firmly holding his leash, resembled nothing so much as a heavy-weight pugilist, bent on delivering the knock-out punch at the earliest opportunity.

The Canon, however, was in his proper element on an occasion of this sort. He knew everybody; he beamed upon everybody, or very nearly everybody; he buzzed about from group to group like a bee in a flower garden. He even dropped a greeting to the Reverend Percy Mills (very much Nonconformist), who was to be observed moving stealthily in the background, a fixed and slightly pathetic smile of enjoyment upon his pale, moony face. Pender decided to go and sit next to Trefusis.

Being to-day young in spirit, he approached the poet from behind, with the playful intention of suddenly clapping a hand on his shoulder. This brilliant jest he in fact successfully accomplished, but Trefusis, though surprised, and even startled, was not amused. "I should have thought you were too old for that sort of thing," he said; and Pender, feeling very much snubbed, sat down on the grass beside him.

"Why aren't you playing?" he asked, when he had plucked up further courage.

Trefusis followed several strokes before he took any notice of this remark. He then regarded Pender with a dispassionate eye, while he slowly counted one—two

—three—four—up to five, on his fingers. "Yes, you are the fifth person who has asked me that question within the last half hour. I don't mind, of course, but do you suppose it will go on all afternoon?"

"I think it very possible," Pender replied.

Trefusis grunted, like a little porker, a sound apparently expressing his opinion of his neighbours. He put his hand in his jacket pocket and produced a paper bag, which, after a preliminary shake productive of an unattractive rattle, he handed to his companion. "Have one," he suggested. "They're not particularly good. . . . The pink ones are flavoured with Brilliantine."

Pender refused this generous offer. "No, thank you," he said, "I'm too old for sweets."

His tone had a melancholy firmness, and Trefusis's steady eyes questioned him. "You're offended," he decided.

Pender nodded. "I am. I dislike being called old, and I dislike being snubbed."

There was a slight pause; then Trefusis remarked, with perceptible kindness,—

"I don't think you're old—merely old enough to have grown out of practical jokes. And as for playing tennis—you know I don't care for games any more than you do yourself."

"You needn't include me at all," said Pender rather crabbedly. "When I was your age I played every kind of game: I was a dab at games."

"You played them well?" asked Trefusis sceptically.

"Yes, exceedingly well."

Trefusis cast a dubious glance upon the quondam athlete. "You haven't any cups or things," he said, in a less certain tone.

"You mean I didn't show them to you," scored Pender, with visible satisfaction.

"I should have seen them if you'd had them. looked at everything: I always do."

"You didn't look at these, however: I keep them in a cupboard."

"I like some kinds of games," Trefusis brought out after a pensive moment or two. "I like dressing up."

Pender gave a scornful laugh. "Dressing up! That's not a game. I know the sort of games you like: Blind Man's Buff; Turn the Trencher; General Post."

"Well—I *do* like them," Trefusis admitted stolidly. "Only I've hardly ever played them," he added, with a sudden regret.

"I like them too," Pender whispered—moved by the wistfulness of that last confession. "I was only swanking about the cups. The only cup I ever got had 'A Present from Brighton' printed on it. I tell you what. We'll give a party, and we'll have games —*our* games—at it."

Trefusis shook his head. "They won't play them. They won't play anything but bridge, and I hate bridge."

"They'll have to play them," said Pender firmly; "either that, or stay at home. I'll let you get up the party yourself—I mean, make out the list of invitations. We'll have a thumping supper, too, and in the intervals you can recite."

"When will it be?" Trefusis asked.

"As soon as you like. Procrastination is the damper of enjoyment. We'll break it tactfully to Mrs. West, and then send out cards: Master Trefusis Heron and Mr. Pender At Home. Games."

"We'll have Tim," said Trefusis.

"Yes, Tim; but not Wopsey. You make out your list and bring it to me. . . . How many poems did you write to-day?"

"I wrote one—this morning."

"Only one! How was that?"

"One is a good deal. Poems aren't just as easy as catching flies. It was about the new bathing-boxes. They want to get up a subscription for them."

"I suppose you'll write one on the tournament. Is that why you're watching it?"

"No." Trefusis suddenly blushed. "I don't care a straw about the tournament; and I shan't stay here very long either."

Pender stared in astonishment. There was a note of defiance in Trefusis's voice which was most puzzling. Also he kept on blushing—he was by this time blushing all over. They gazed at each other in silence.

"Trefusis," Pender said at last, solemnly, "I don't believe you are here for any purpose even remotely connected with tennis. I believe you are here simply because you are interested in one of the players, though you aren't man enough to confess it."

"I am man enough. I came to watch Miss Burton play. And I *have* watched her—so there."

Pender heaved a sigh of fellow-feeling. His voice dropped. "It's very odd, but—I am here for that too."

"Well, I know you are."

"But she doesn't seem to be playing now," Pender said, "so we can talk about your poem. The fact is, I am extremely curious about it. I want to know how you could find an inspiration in bathing-boxes, whether new or old. I can't even imagine."

"Oh, the subject doesn't matter," Trefusis explained, with a slightly superior air. "Besides, I didn't actually write *about* the bathing-boxes: they were a starting point."

"But a starting point to what? I still don't see it. What could bathing-boxes, in *any* circumstances, possibly suggest?"

"Bathing—naturally," answered Trefusis brightly. "I'll tell you how the poem begins, if you like."

"Do," said Pender. "I should like it immensely. I should like to know how it's done. I should even like to know *why* it's done. You seem, I mean, deliberately to choose the most difficult subjects."

Trefusis, without the faintest trace of embarrassment, began in a clear treble voice to repeat his verses:—

" ' From these new boxes bright how oft shall we
See beauteous female forms, though draped, emerge,
And run down to the blue enamelled sea,
To dance and sing where Neptune's billows surge ! '

That's the first verse. Do you like it ? "

Pender considered dubiously. " I'm not quite sure that I do," he confessed at last. " It sounds, to me, even slightly improper. You prigged ' enamelled sea ' from Yeats, too : that's the result of lending you books. . . . And we *don't*—at least I hope we don't —hang about the ladies' bathing-place waiting for female forms to emerge. It would be the worst possible form. No, I don't think I like it."

Trefusis, utterly unmoved by this criticism, stuffed a large, hard sweet into his cheek. " Well, I bet I get half-a-crown for it, anyway," he said. " Father gives me half-a-crown for every poem I write."

" Even if he thinks it isn't good ? "

" He always thinks it good."

Pender sighed and got up. " I'm going away," he said. " I shall leave you to the Muses, Trefusis—the profitable Muses. I am going to talk to Dr. Olphert and Canon Burton : they're not quite so cynical."

He stood for a moment looking down at the poet, who remained seated on the grass, audibly enjoying his sweet. The poet, in fact, really perplexed him. This matter of half-crowns so recklessly distributed threw an unsuspected and rather dreadful light upon the whole source of inspiration. Pender doubted if anybody else knew about it. " You are making a mistake, Trefusis," he suddenly warned him. " I mean, the subject does matter—it matters immensely ; because unless you can get a certain amount of feeling into your verses they will not be poems. This morning, in Plutarch, I came across what seemed to me quite a good subject for a poem, and I will make you a

present of it. . . . When Sulla was in Apollonia, his soldiers brought him a satyr they had found sleeping in some sacred place—a place where there were rocks and streams and fire. The satyr tried to speak, but nobody could understand him. Interpreters were fetched, but they could make out nothing, they could only hear in what he said strange sounds which seemed to them between the neighing of a horse and the bleating of a goat. Sulla in the end told them to let the creature go, and he at once bounded off and they never saw him again. . . . Look it up in Plutarch. But if you do write about it, remember this time you are writing for me."

"What difference does that make?" asked Trefusis.

"It must be done in my way—otherwise I shan't pay for it. You must try to see it and hear it and feel it and smell it before you even begin. And there must be no poetic language—not a word. Waves aren't to be called 'Neptune's billows.' Women aren't to be called 'beauteous female forms.' You can be as fantastic as you please, you can put it into rhymed or unrhymed verse—for that matter into prose—but you mustn't use a word that you wouldn't use if you were actually telling me the story."

"But will it be a poem if I don't?" Trefusis doubted.

"That I can't say. It will be an experiment."

With this he strolled on to where Olphert and Canon Burton appeared to be fraternising—also an experiment, he suspected. The Canon hailed him genially, but in his geniality Pender fancied he could detect relief.

"Ah, Rex, I want you. I want five shillings for the new bathing-boxes."

Pender put his hands behind his back and shook his head. "No," he refused emphatically. "I don't bathe, I don't watch the bathers, nor do I approve of all these women, though draped, dancing and singing on the sands. It's vulgar: at any rate I don't like it, and I refuse to encourage it."

The Canon's smile slowly faded. As his eyes became rounder and rounder, he grew more and more like the

dogs in the Tinder Box story. Pender was beginning to feel something of an affection for the Canon, and he found this facial capacity for expressing an artless and infantile bewilderment one of the most endearing things about him.

"I'm sure I never heard of it!" the Canon exclaimed, when he had recovered from his first shock. "I think you must be mistaken. It certainly can't have been the people who habitually make use of the bathing-boxes. I believe there *were* some excursionists down here last week—Presbyterians. Perhaps——"

"Well, that may help to explain it, of course. Still the fact remains that the bathing-boxes have inspired Trefusis with a poem distinctly in the spirit of the *Laus Veneris*, and we don't want that kind of thing in Ballycastle."

"Ah, Trefusis!" the Canon laughed. "I haven't seen this new poem. Wasn't it Chatterton—or was it Keats—who was called 'the marvellous boy'?"

"I don't know; but it's Trefusis now at any rate."

"Yes—Trefusis now. . . . *Aliusque et idem*. . . . I often thought of asking you—you have had some experience of teaching boys—I often thought of asking you how you think he will turn out?"

"Who? Trefusis?"

"Yes. He's rather an interesting problem at present. You've read the other poems, I suppose—the volume that is to be published?"

"Well, I've read most of them, I dare say—or rather the author read them to me."

"And what did you think?"

"I don't know that I thought at all. Certainly I didn't discover anything to throw much light upon the future. He may become a banker, or a schoolmaster, or a professor like his father—or even a poet, for all I can see."

The Canon looked somewhat taken aback by this answer. He did not reply for a moment, but presently he said, "Then you consider our—our enthusiasm—not altogether justified?"

Pender laughed. "Well, how enthusiastic *are* you?" he asked. "A good deal depends on that, doesn't it?"

The Canon turned to Olphert for support. "You think highly of the poems, Doctor, don't you? You were one of the original subscribers."

But Olphert was even more disappointing. "I think he's a very remarkable young ruffian—if that's any good to you. Deep—too deep for most of his admirers."

"Oh, it isn't a game," said Pender quickly. "It's not bluff: he's not pulling anybody's leg. That would imply that he himself knew—and he doesn't; he knows nothing about it."

The Doctor chuckled. "Perhaps not."

"It's simply his father," Pender went on. "The whole thing is parrot work. His mind has been sown carefully with horrid ugly little rules and tags and phrases, and they've all sprung up, like the tares in the parable, but they can't have any roots to speak of."

"Your parables are rather mixed," the Doctor objected, "the tares, if I remember rightly, did have roots."

But Pender went on,—

"Small boys—younger than Trefusis—*do* occasionally produce poetry, if left to themselves. Only, you mustn't hamper them with rules—above all with the idiotic rules Trefusis has been taught. If you allow them to be quite natural, you may just possibly get a result. I've got them myself. Nothing sustained, of course—a phrase, at most a stanza, a flash of imagination that has a kind of bright, clear innocence and freshness. But the most striking thing about Trefusis's poetry is that it is so utterly false that it leaves you nothing to go upon. It is exactly as if he had never written a line in his life. It *isn't* his. It is his father's. And it would be quite unfair to deduce from it that Trefusis himself is devoid of imagination, or even of a sense of beauty."

Pender had been conscious for the past minute or two that the Canon's face was growing longer and longer. It was not, however, till he had concluded

his unflattering vindication of the poet that he suddenly remembered the preface. "Of course I am only airing my own view," he hastily added, "and I'm afraid it's a shockingly narrow one. It is just broad enough to hold the kind of poetry I happen to like myself. My idea of poetry, you see, is of a mysterious thing—a kind of mixture of enchantment and music—something immensely primitive—a survival—old—old as Egyptian magic. That kind of poetry obviously can't be taught, and everything Trefusis does *has* been taught to him. I don't mean to say technique isn't of great importance, and of course it is quite proper that Trefusis should learn something about rhyme and metre: but rhyme and metre, however dazzlingly handled, in themselves are no more than the walls of the house. I mean, unless it is a haunted house, there is for me no poetry. . . . What do you think?—that I am talking nonsense, I suppose."

"I dare say there is something in what you say," the Canon managed to ejaculate. "The idea of a haunted house may perhaps seem a little morbid——"

"All Pender's ideas are morbid," Olphert corroborated cheerfully. "He is a morbid person—lop-sided, a crank, essentially a voluptuary—if you can imagine a spiritual voluptuary."

"Of course, he was only giving us his idea of *poetry*," the Canon hurriedly distinguished, "and he admitted himself it was a narrow one."

The Doctor laughed. "Distinctly narrow. I hardly see the *Iliad* squeezing into it; and I *don't* see the *Canterbury Tales*—nor *Don Juan*—nor the *Rape of the Lock*—nor the *Annus Mirabilis*—nor a good many other things. . . . You needn't defend him, for he's the same all through—a spiritual voluptuary—intent on his own soul's intoxication—against all progress—against every attempt at the rationalisation of life—superstitious without being religious—the worst type of reactionary."

"I don't quite know what you mean by the

rationalisation of life," Pender replied. "As for your progress——"

"Do you think any good can *really* come from this unfortunate industrial upheaval?" the Canon questioned nervously. "I am in sympathy with socialism up to a certain point——"

"The point where it begins to be practical—eh?" Olphert chuckled cynically. "Pender's whole attitude towards life is hopelessly wrong; therefore his theory of poetry must be wrong, too."

The Canon glanced at Pender as if to learn how he would take this, but apparently it had no effect on him whatever. "Doesn't that rather beg the question?" he merely answered mildly. "And in what way is my attitude so hopeless?"

"It couldn't, with your temperament, be anything else," Olphert asserted roundly. "Sensitiveness, a sense of beauty—all these things you so prize in people—are the last things we ought to encourage in anybody we really care for. If I had a son, I would do everything I could to make him as thick-skinned as possible. His chance of happiness depends upon it. That is why I subscribe to the poetry of Trefusis. It is so healthy, so free from disturbing suggestions. If he had happened to be an Edgar Allan Poe now—who also wrote at the age of thirteen—I would *not* have subscribed to it."

"There is the happiness of the artist," said Pender, for lack of anything better, and the Canon applauded this extremely doubtful point.

"The *un*happiness, I should have thought," Olphert retorted dryly. "The artist is a freak, a monstrosity: his whole outlook is absurd. He is a neurotic and peevish child, who gets furious if you don't like what he likes. How could anybody be happy with such a nature? And he is the least appreciative creature in the world himself. The literary taste of a musician, or a painter, is usually a thing to weep over. He revels in exactly what he storms at the public for

admiring where his own art is concerned. As for the things that really *matter* in life——! No: take my advice, my dear Pender, and leave Trefusis alone. All this silly fuss about his poems will die out. He is a perfectly normal boy who has been brought up abnormally. His poems are, as you yourself said, simply a monkey trick which his intelligence has made it easy to teach him, just as it would have made it easy to teach him any other. His perseverance in writing is merely due to us—our excitement, our admiration, the Canon's prefaces. As soon as we cease to praise, Trefusis will cease to produce. You can take my word for it, he would cease to-morrow, if he were sent, as he ought to be, to a public school."

"I don't know that I have exhibited much excitement," answered Pender, "or have even felt any. But I've no doubt you are right."

"Perhaps not excitement exactly—but exaggerated interest. Besides, I strongly suspect from your conversation just now that you have a secret plan—a plan to put him on what you call 'the right track.' You have already lent him books. You have already given him advice. . . . And I deplore these efforts. . . . He is quite clever enough to see that your opinion is worth more than his father's—more even perhaps than the Canon's. The result will be that he will try to do what he imagines *you* want. And you'll swallow it. You'll swallow it because your conscience, your good-nature, your sense of responsibility, your natural prejudice—everything, in short, will urge you to do so. But it will be just as much a trick as the other, and will give him into the bargain an added feeling of superiority, which is highly undesirable."

Pender did not mention that he had already suggested a poem to Trefusis; he simply proposed that they should go and get some tea. And as they strolled along together, the Canon between them, the absurdity of his assuming the rôle of Mentor to any young Telemachus was still further demonstrated by the Doctor.

"If you really weren't exactly the kind of person I have described, instead of wrangling with the Canon about poetics at such a moment, you would be taking an absorbing interest in all this." He waved his stick at the tennis-courts—that scene of brightness and eagerness and swiftness and colour. "Amazing spectacle! And just think from what a mustard seed it has been created—this intense happiness—this intense enthusiasm. Why don't you point all *this* out to Trefusis? One might almost say we have created it from nothing. The patting of a ball backwards and forwards over a net; a little elaboration; a few rules: result, every conceivable virtue—courage, self-control, patience, determination, joy, a conviction that life is an excellent thing and the world an excellent place. What has your miserable poetry about white moons and setting Time and dust closing Helen's eye to offer comparable with it?"

"Nothing—nothing at all," Pender hastened to agree.

"Well, I'm glad you admit it: that is at least a step in the right direction."

"I didn't know you were such a tennis enthusiast, Doctor," the Canon was beginning in surprise, when Olphert cut him short,—

"I'm not. What I'm praising is our extraordinary ingenuity—the ingenuity of the human race—its capacity for turning quite unpromising material to the best possible account. We *are* confoundedly ingenious, you know. If we were only a shade less greedy we might do wonders. Take religion. Consider what it once was, and what we have made of it. Consider the whole idea of the human soul. What has *that* sprung from?"

"I should almost be inclined to guess from tennis-tournaments," Pender hazarded, but Olphert was not to be diverted from his path. "On the contrary, it sprang from a feeling of pessimism, such as arises the moment we stand *aside* from the game of life, and begin to think. In these pernicious moments life on earth

is felt to be unsatisfactory and meaningless—the grinning skull peeps out from its mask of roses—yet had it not been for these moments the doctrine of a future life would never have been invented. Again our ingenuity has proved triumphantly equal to the occasion."

It was at this point that a little cough from the Canon warned Pender that the conversation had taken a dangerous turn. That cough was marvellously achieved: it was not only an admonition, but was at the same time potent as a spell, and, in the brief pause that ensued, the white sea-birds flying overhead seemed to darken into venerable rooks, circling immemorially about a tapering cathedral spire.

"I fancy it is wiser not to pry too closely into these things," said the Canon, giving full value to that slight introductory hush. "At the best we are merely working in the dark, since we start off with the assumption that our minds are capable of comprehending the infinite mind. A spiritual anthropomorphism is of all vanities the most dangerously insidious, since it leads us to measure the divine purpose by our own poor human standards. We may rest content with the fact of there being at least abundant proof that from the beginning a religious sense was implanted in man."

Only Olphert, Pender felt, would have been capable after this of the speech which he immediately produced. "What do you mean by the beginning? I doubt if we had much religious sense when we were still swinging ourselves happily from branch to branch."

The Canon—who in some remote period of youth had "reconciled" Darwin—did not reply, but his reticence merely urged Olphert to the further question, "Has it never struck you how unfortunate is this descent from the ape? No amount of ingenuity, I grant you, can quite cover *that* deplorable accident. Almost any other animal must have produced a more pleasing posterity. Even our young—particularly in the stage of adolescence—seem to lack the charm which distinguishes the young of other creatures. They rejoice

in ugliness; they rejoice above all in torturing something weaker than themselves. Watch a herd of such on a holiday: the very noises they make are deliberately hoarse and hideous. Why should these things be? Young thrushes and blackbirds do not require to be elaborately educated before they can make pleasant sounds. It is all, very obviously, the descent from the ape."

"For so ardent a democrat," Pender said, "your portrait of the 'natural man' is a little surprising. Now if I were to express *my* views——"

"You haven't any," Olphert assured him. "You've only prejudices. Views are what a man arrives at after some preliminary study and thought. The Canon has views—several of them quite charming, in a mediæval sort of way—but to *your* opinions, Pender, I absolutely refuse the slightest consideration or respect. You take no interest in history, no interest in politics, no interest in social problems, therefore you can take no intelligent or unselfish interest in humanity. Your interest in Trefusis is about as far as you go, and on analysis what do we discover it to be? That you think he speaks rather nicely, is rather quaint, that it amuses you to be cheeked by him. I venture to say that if Trefusis had a squint, ate with his knife, and spoke with a Ballymena accent, we should hear no more of his poems were they twice as good as they are, and should no longer meet him rushing over to Ramoan for lunch or tea. As I began by saying, you are simply an Epicurean with a taste for the marvellous, and what, with the best will in the world, can we hope for from that?"

"There is an old proverb, that bad words break no bones," the Canon observed to Pender.

But Pender shook his head. "Olphert's words break more than my bones," he answered, "they very nearly break my heart. They are prompted, you see, by jealousy. He is jealous of Trefusis. How can I help preferring a poet's company to his? . . . And the poet will have finished all the food, too, unless we hurry up: he has already cleared the particular plate of buns on which I had my eye."

II

PREPARATIONS, vigorous preparations for the fête, began a few days after the conclusion of the tournament. When he had promised to lend Ramoan to Cousin Nellie and her committee, Pender had not guessed how much preparation would be necessary. Fortunately, Cousin Nellie herself was absent. She had gone to Scotland, to the John Burtons, to be present at the marriage of their eldest daughter. She had started in the highest possible spirits, and had left minute instructions which Pender was to see that the committee carried out.

Cousin Nellie, if she did not love the John Burtons, at least loved weddings. They touched a mystic and poetic chord in her heart; she liked to get a seat as near the front as possible; she usually wept; and altogether enjoyed herself immensely. It is true that on the present occasion her enjoyment had been to some extent mitigated by the expenses incurred. These had been simply shocking. Besides the expense of travelling, there had been the expense of new clothes, and the expense of a wedding-present—though, as to this last, she had managed to effect a compromise with the Canon's absurdly extravagant ideas. Theodore was really too silly about such things: people didn't *want* presents like that: there was a tinge of ostentation about them, if not of positive vulgarity. No need, of course, to be mean; but a cruet-stand, a set of carvers—what more could Jinny possibly expect? And Cousin Nellie secretly determined to stay three or four days with the John Burtons, so as to reimburse herself in some slight degree for all she might have to spend before she got there.

On the afternoon of her departure Miss Foy came to Ramoan. Nobody had been told beforehand of the

tremendous event, though within two hours of her arrival all Ballycastle knew that it had taken place. And naturally it created excitement. Mrs. Burton's silence, her departure for Glasgow without so much as a hint as to what she thought on the subject, added indeed a piquancy to the already sufficiently intriguing situation, which made it positively irresistible. Conjecture was rife, and Miss Foy herself, perhaps, wondered more than anybody. She had embarked upon the desperate adventure with a fluttering heart of timid recklessness—urged, goaded, driven by Dr. Olphert, who had seemed entirely unable to appreciate her point of view, her difficulties and hesitations, who had seemed to see nothing except the benefit she would be conferring on his patient. It had never struck Miss Foy, till Dr. Olphert pointed it out, that she *would* be conferring a benefit, that she would be behaving selfishly, that she would simply be sacrificing Mr. Pender to an unworthy and ridiculous scruple, if she refused his invitation. She had not regarded it in this light at all. But Dr. Olphert could see it in no other. He had, in fact, managed the light so effectively, had turned it on and off so dexterously, that by the time he had finished, poor Miss Foy—dazzled, bewildered, hypnotised—had been unable to think anything except what he told her to think. So she consented. It still appeared strange to her that she should be able to do so much for Mr. Pender ; but doing things for people was a luxury not lightly to be foregone ; and she blossomed out marvellously in her new character of benefactress, feeling, and actually looking, several years younger.

And what seemed to prove how right the Doctor had been was the fact that Pender had fallen ill again on the very day of her arrival. He had, somehow, caught a chill (Miss Foy blamed the tournament), and its rapid and disastrous effect upon him appeared to prove how superficial had been the recovery from that earlier attack of influenza. He had insisted,

nevertheless, that the fête should not be postponed. It was to be on the Saturday—the fifth day of Miss Foy's rule—and he had left to her all the alarming responsibility of making arrangements. The management was still in the hands of the committee, headed, in Cousin Nellie's absence, by Mrs. O'Clery; but all Friday, from early morning till late in the evening, while the air was filled with the noise and bustle of preparation, while tents were being put up, while the drawing-room was being arranged as a concert room, and other rooms were being set apart for other purposes, Miss Foy was in the very centre of activity, with everybody appealing to her for advice, asking permission to do this and that and the other, and not waiting till she had given it.

There were moments when she half wished Mrs. Burton had been there to relieve her of so onerous a duty, and there were other moments when she was terror-stricken by the dreadful certainty that she *would* be there to-morrow, and that she would have to meet her for the first time since her installation at Ramoan. She expressed the former of these two contradictory feelings to Miss Tonie Ronayne. "It would have been so much better," she fluttered anxiously, "if Mrs. Burton had been here to take charge. I don't want to disturb Mr. Pender, and indeed it isn't much use asking him anything, for he only says, 'Do what you like!'"

"Well, you can tell him we're doin' it," replied Miss Ronayne cheerfully. "And it's a perfect God-send that woman *isn't* here, gettin' in everybody's way, and settin' the whole lot of them by the ears."

But on the afternoon of the fête itself, when people actually began to arrive, Miss Foy simply surrendered. It had passed out of her hands now: this swarm of visitors, some of whom she did not even know by sight, would behave exactly as they themselves pleased. They seemed to her to flock through the gates in hundreds. Admission being by payment, the whole

of Ballycastle was there, while quite a number of people must have come from a distance.

The party from the Rectory arrived late, and as Miss Foy saw Mrs. Burton single her out at once, to bear swiftly down upon her, she had a cowardly impulse to seek refuge in flight. Mrs. Burton looked hot and flushed, and Miss Foy by some sixth sense divined her purpose to be hostile. Nor was she mistaken. The flush was partly due to a blazing sun, for they had walked, and Cousin Nellie was a poor walker—but it also owed not a little to a sense of injury which had been gradually accumulating. Mrs. Burton was angry, was oozing disapproval at every pore. She did not even smile, and her greeting was of a kind that left little doubt as to what she thought of the new situation at Ramoan.

"Well, Miss Foy, *this* is a surprise! I may mention that I was told nothing whatever about it till Norah told me on the boat last night."

Miss Foy trembled. It was useless to pretend that she could not guess what the surprise consisted in. "But I thought——" she stammered. "We all supposed—you knew."

"I don't know who 'we all' may be," returned Mrs. Burton acrimoniously. "What I *do* know is that Mr. Pender did not tell me; neither did Norah; and neither did you."

"I quite thought——" Miss Foy hurriedly fixed her glasses, which she had jerked off in her agitation.

"It doesn't much matter what you quite thought," snapped Mrs. Burton. "It is rather late on the day for explanations and excuses now. *They* evidently intended to keep me in the dark. I consider it was your duty, in the circumstances, to come and tell me yourself. Both Canon Burton and I have been treated disgracefully."

Miss Foy was the picture of consternation. Her distress was indeed so genuine that had the crime been less heinous Cousin Nellie might have overlooked it.

"I'm so sorry, Mrs. Burton. . . . But I never knew they——"

"How *is* Mr. Pender?" Mrs Burton interrupted impatiently.

"He's much better to-day. He wanted to get up."

Mrs. Burton glared, as if this were some new offence. "That, *too*, I suppose, was to have been kept a profound secret. We didn't even hear till we arrived home that he had been ill."

"He only fell ill on the afternoon you left," Miss Foy answered weakly.

"I'm perfectly aware of when he took ill, thank you. There was *ample* time for a telegram to have been sent: it would have reached us either at the station or the boat."

"He didn't desire one to be sent," Miss Foy murmured more weakly still. "I mean—nobody even thought of it."

But this artless explanation seemed to strike Mrs. Burton as a further defiance. Fortunately, she appeared to doubt its veracity. "Poor man—I expect he was too ill to desire *any*thing," she said. "If I had known in time I should never have *dreamed* of going to Scotland—let alone of allowing all this to go on." Her words comprehended the entire fête, but her glance, as she spoke, appeared to concentrate itself particularly upon the McCracken family, who were innocently emerging from one of the refreshment tents, bearing ices on plates. "*You* might at least have let me know."

"But I didn't know myself," Miss Foy replied. She turned irresolutely towards the refuge of the house, and then again she faced her inquisitor. "He told me it was nothing."

"When did you arrive?"

"On the afternoon you left."

"I see. One might almost say that you *timed* your arrival, then."

Miss Foy answered nothing. She was rather good

at saying nothing—and in fact, in the present encounter, her silence was a more effective weapon than her speech. Not that she had the slightest desire to wield any weapon. She sought only to appease Cousin Nellie, but failed to discover how. And what made it worse was that she felt guilty—felt that Mrs. Burton was justified, or very nearly justified, in everything she had said. All the arguments Dr. Olphert had carefully impressed upon her of a sudden lost their cogency; her one impulse was to hasten as quickly as possible to her room and pack. She had turned very white, and there was an expression in her eyes that was tragic, because it contained no spark of resentment. Cousin Nellie, notoriously tender-hearted—Cousin Nellie who had wept at the wedding in Glasgow—looked at her without a pang. "I should like to *see* Mr. Pender," she announced magisterially. "Since you say he is better I will go to him now. It may help to cheer him up.'

She made straight for the house without further ado. Miss Foy was really beneath notice, and though she had said one or two things to her that she had wanted to say, her victory brought Cousin Nellie very little appeasement. Her ill-temper, for that matter, was not chiefly directed against Miss Foy. She was angry with her, naturally, but she was angrier with Norah (who ought at this very moment to have been by Pender's side, whose behaviour was utterly incomprehensible), and she was angriest of all with the invalid whom she proposed to visit. An interview with Pender, Cousin Nellie felt, she positively *must* have, and have it at once, before she could even hope to regain her peace of mind. She had been thinking of it for hours and hours; the thought of it had kept her awake on the boat last night, and it had haunted her in the train all morning. She followed close on the heels of Mrs. West, who had intercepted her halfway upstairs.

She pushed into the room before Mrs. West had

even time to say she was there, and advanced immediately to the bedside. Pender was half lying, half sitting, propped up on three or four pillows, writing. His sallow face looked thinner and more sallow than usual; his hair was ruffled, and a single dark, dank lock, clinging closely to his forehead, increased the effect of haggardness and emaciation which his whole appearance presented. His eyes seemed unnaturally bright; his hands unnaturally thin. He certainly *looked* ill, but then, as Cousin Nellie reflected practically, he had never looked anything else, so one need not begin to worry now. He regarded his visitor for the fraction of a minute with an expression of intense impatience, which was a sign, too, that he had not quite recovered. Cousin Nellie, however, was impervious to signs. "I'm afraid I'm interrupting you, Rex," was her sole acknowledgment of this one. "I hear you have been ill, and I'm sorry nobody told me sooner. I shouldn't have gone away if I had known."

"I'm glad, then, you didn't," Pender answered resignedly. "I'm sure you enjoyed yourself much more where you were than you would have with me."

Mrs. Burton seated herself near the foot of the bed, and, in spite of her remark about cheering him up, gazed at the patient with intense gloom. "I hope my own enjoyment is not what I principally seek," she returned, with a light in her eye that did not encourage contradiction. "I suppose, having promised to be a bridesmaid, Norah would have been obliged to go, but I should certainly have remained behind to nurse you."

"That would have been very kind, but very unnecessary," Pender murmured. "It would have been a useless self-sacrifice on your part, to say nothing of the disappointment you would have inflicted on all the people who expected you. I have been splendidly nursed in every way."

This elaborate courtesy, however, produced no mollifying effect upon Cousin Nellie. It struck her,

in fact, as hollow in the extreme. "By whom?" she asked, with a rigid countenance. "By Miss Foy? When one is ill one doesn't want strangers about. Norah is waiting now to come up, but I thought I'd better not bring her till I saw how you were first."

"Miss Foy is hardly a stranger," Pender objected mildly. "You must remember I have known her since I was a little boy."

"How long is she going to stay?" Cousin Nellie demanded without further parley.

"For as long as I can persuade her to. It required a good deal of persuasion to get her to come at all, you know."

Cousin Nellie's eyes were fixed on him searchingly. "Did it? Am I to take it then that she doesn't *want* to stay? I can at least understand that. *Most* people would regard it as—to say the least—a peculiar arrangement."

"Why?" Pender inquired.

But as Cousin Nellie did not mention why, he went on: "I'm afraid I don't very much care *how* people regard it. It's a rather dull arrangement, I should think, for Miss Foy—especially when I am like this. But even so, it can't be duller than living in lodgings, and it must be more comfortable."

"And when you're better what is going to happen?" Cousin Nellie broke in incredulously. "Doesn't it interfere very much with her plans?"

"What plans, Cousin Nellie? I didn't know she had any plans. You must tell me about them. At any rate, I'm sure they're not half so good as mine."

"Her teaching," said Mrs. Burton, whose patience was beginning to ebb. "She can hardly afford to lose her pupils, I should think."

"Ah, I see what you mean."

"I'm glad you do see it then, for it is certainly what will happen if she stays on *here* for any length of time. The future, I'm afraid, must be considered as well as

the present. You must think of her, not only of yourself."

Pender laughed. Cousin Nellie usually ended by amusing him, but she was never so amusing as when she was unselfish. "I hope she *will* lose them," he said pleasantly. "I think she has taught quite long enough. Besides, her pupils can come here, if they want to. One or two of them *have* come, I believe. They rather like it."

But Mrs. Burton did not respond to his sudden air of gaiety. She was not going to let him off so easily as this. "I think it most strange that you did not mention the matter beforehand," she said; "that neither you nor Norah should have mentioned it. I am the last person in the world to seek for confidences when they are not freely offered, but I must say that in this case, when Norah at last did think fit to tell me, I felt hurt. I dislike secretiveness. I like people to be perfectly frank and above-board—especially when there is no need to be anything else."

"But I assure you I wasn't in the least secretive," Pender answered good-humouredly. "Miss Foy only made up her mind at the last moment: in fact we really rather rushed her into it."

"Who are 'we'?" Mrs. Burton asked. "Doctor Olphert, I suppose. . . . It would certainly be quite like him to interfere. But it would be a precious long time, in spite of all his palaver to you and other people, before he asked Miss Foy to come to *him*."

"Why should he ask her?" Pender inquired lazily.

"Why should you, then?" Cousin Nellie flared up. "Is it your intention that she shall stay here always?"

Pender gave a deprecating shrug. "Dear Cousin Nellie, 'always' is a very big word. . . . That, however, was my intention when I invited her," he somewhat quaintly added.

But dear Cousin Nellie was not to be placated by a suavity which struck her as mannered and affected at the best of times. "Even after you are married?"

she went on, controlling her irritation with more and more difficulty. "What is to become of Miss Foy when you and Norah set up house?"

"Isn't there room for everybody?" Pender suggested carelessly. "The house is large enough. And the date of our marriage hasn't even been settled yet."

Mrs. Burton fixed her small eyes upon him. She felt a sudden distrust of her prospective son-in-law. "You do not seem very eager to settle it," she said.

There was a silence, while a faint flush crept over Pender's sallow cheeks. Mrs. Burton, too, had coloured. She had gone rather farther than she had intended; she would have given a good deal, in fact, to have been able to recall those last words, but she knew that she could not even attenuate their meaning. She had said what neither of them would forget—what it was all the more imprudent for her to say, because at heart she was beginning to believe it to be true. She decided that tears might help matters, might at least break this ominous silence, so she dabbed at her eyes with her pocket-handkerchief.

Certain physical characteristics made it easy for Cousin Nellie to simulate grief—at any rate to achieve that general wateriness of aspect which frequently accompanies it; but Pender did not even look at her, and in the stillness her courage sank, she became mortally afraid. She ventured on a subdued sniff, which awakened no response whatever. Removing her pocket-handkerchief and glancing at the invalid furtively, she perceived that he had actually closed his eyes. What did *this* mean? She rose to her feet. "Well, Rex, I shall leave you," she quavered dolefully. "I can see you do not wish to talk to me. In fairness to Norah I had to say what I did say; but you must act as you think best."

"Say what you like to me," he answered impassively, "but remember I will have no nonsense where Miss Foy is concerned. You had better understand that clearly. I will have no one in this house who shows her

the least rudeness, who is not prepared to treat her as my guest.

"I trust I am not in the habit of being rude to people —no matter what their position may be," Mrs. Burton retorted with dignity. But this final insult, eclipsing all that had gone before, showed her there was nothing further to be done, and with all the visible signs of wounded virtue, she rushed from the room.

It was not Mrs. Burton, but an outraged empress, who descended Ramoan stairs. She returned to the scene of the fête and gazed round for Norah, but no Norah was visible. She perceived Jack, however, one of a group surrounding a roulette table, over which Miss Tonie Ronayne presided. Mrs. Burton was astonished. She had strongly disapproved of having roulette; she had been even under the impression that she had quashed the idea decisively at the last committee meeting; and now here it was in full swing. She descended upon her son, whose face, as he caught sight of her, and of Miss Ronayne's observant eye twinkling upon them both, had turned a bright pink. But Mrs. Burton cared not a jot how pink it turned. She drew him, almost forcibly, away from temptation, and while he sulkily accompanied her, asked, "Where is Norah?"

Jack shrugged his thick shoulders. "In her skin, I suppose," he answered politely.

Mrs. Burton surveyed him with dissatisfaction. It was, indeed, rather difficult, even for a mother, to idealise Jack, or to be in any way enthusiastic concerning him. He stood there, rattling the money in his trouser pockets, an incipent scowl upon his heavy face, while he chewed at the end of a cigarette. "Haven't you seen her?" Mrs. Burton went on, a little hopelessly. "Why aren't you with her?"

Jack's sullenness turned straightway to derision. "She wants me—doesn't she?" he jeered. His little eyes were fixed on the group at the roulette table, and his mother knew that directly she released him he

would gravitate back there, as he always did towards everything undesirable.

"Haven't you seen her?" she asked once more.

"I saw her about half an hour ago. I haven't seen her since."

"And who was with her?"

"George Best."

Mrs. Burton, gazing at him—gazing with very little confidence indeed—suppressed the comment that rose to her lips. She considered a moment. Then she said: "I want you to go and look for her. You must bring her back."

"Back where?" Jack grunted unamiably.

"Back to *me*. Tell her I want her *now*. I shall be somewhere near the house."

"But I don't know where she is. They mayn't be here at all."

"They surely haven't left the grounds!" cried Mrs. Burton in dismay. "Tell me at once if you saw them go?"

A peculiar sound, which presently revealed itself as her son's laughter, became audible. "I don't know what they've done. Didn't I say I hadn't seen them—not since that first time."

"Where is your father, then?"

"How can I tell? Moochin' round, I suppose, as usual. The last time I saw him he was boozing in the refreshment tent."

Mrs. Burton gazed despairingly on all sides, but among the crowd of heartless revellers no Canon was visible. Even the lynx-eyed Adeline, who would have been infinitely more useful than Jack, was, on this fatal afternoon, also perversely missing. "Well, you must go immediately and look for Norah."

Again that irritating, sepulchral sound of mirth arose.

"Go—go!" Mrs. Burton literally pushed him—pushed vigorously his fat, exasperating back—in her helplessness and disgust.

"All right: keep your hair on: I'm going," Jack grunted. "Can you lend me five bob?"

"No, I can't—I won't. Go at once, when I tell you."

Jack lounged slowly off till he was out of sight of his mother, whom he knew to be watching his progress. Then he paused. "No pay, no work," he chuckled philosophically. He produced a fresh cigarette, and lit it as he looked about, not for Mabel Stevenson (his passion for that young lady having cooled), but for some other "flapper" whose appearance might be sufficiently passable to justify the effort of conversation.

PART VII

THE READING

" But Psyche, uplifting her finger,
Said : ' Sadly this star I mistrust—
Her pallor I strangely mistrust.' "
EDGAR POE.

OLPHERT had promised to listen to the reading of the manuscript, and on the night arranged he dined with Pender and Miss Foy at Ramoan. At half-past nine the two men retired to the study, Pender still looking rather shaken, though he had been up and out for several days. But the weather had broken, had turned stormy and cold, and to-night wind and rain beat with an almost wintry violence against the house.

" Chaffinch and I tried to play a round of golf this afternoon," Olphert said, " but gave it up after losing three balls. The only other people on the links were young Best and Miss Burton."

Pender had risen to draw the curtains, but something, though he could not have said what, in the Doctor's remarks brought him to a pause. Possibly it was his fancy, but they sounded to him unnaturally deliberate : they seemed, that is, to have been made with a purpose, and the first for the sake of the second. With his back to the room, and his hands on the still undrawn curtains, he stood there for a minute or two, facing the darkened wind-swept lawn and waving trees ; then he drew the curtains together and went to the writing-table for his manuscript. " How do you like George Best ? " he asked, while he stooped over a drawer.

" He's quite a decent fellow. Not much in him, but

all right, I should think. I've known him since he was a youngster."

The Doctor bent forward to the blaze of the fire, which lit up his bushy black beard and rough black hair, and glittered in his spectacles. He filled and lit his pipe before settling his bulky form more comfortably; but he said nothing further.

"He promised to come to see me," Pender went on, "though he never came. . . . However, that doesn't matter, so long as he doesn't come to-night. I'd rather like to finish the whole of this thing to-night—that is, so far as I've gone."

"Well—I'm quite ready," Olphert replied. "Am I to interrupt?"

"Certainly not. You can make as many remarks as you like at the end, but interruptions would be fatal." As he spoke Pender arranged his manuscript on the table before him, scanning the first few pages with a certain hesitancy, almost as if waiting for a signal to begin.

The wind seemed to have fallen a little, but it still whistled and cried about the house, with a cry that rose above the fainter, more continuous roar of the trees. The Doctor smoked in silence. Then, in the big, low-ceilinged, shadowy room (with its tall, dark, curtained windows, and the lamplight streaming over his shoulder, lighting one side of his face, and falling on the white, square sheets as he turned them), Pender read what he had written.

Olphert never moved. Pender's low, clear voice rose and fell to an accompaniment of wind and brief stormy showers of rain—rose and fell monotonously, with a brooding, rather heavy rhythm, that produced a curious, perhaps calculated, effect. At any rate, the voice, and the floating lamplight, and the surrounding shadow, and the uneasy crying of the wind, seemed all part of the same incantation, which, as it proceeded, called up before Olphert's vision a strange, intensely vivid life—glowing, troubled, and not wholly pleasant.

He had a sense of something slightly overpowering: he had a sense of dreaming, of dreaming uneasily, and as if with a subconscious struggle to awaken before the end, the climax, should be reached. But he did not awaken—did not at least awaken himself—and when Pender's voice broke off abruptly, it was almost with the bewildering shock of a light that has been switched on in a deep darkness: the Doctor was obliged to blink and rub his eyes before he could obtain a grasp of the suddenly altered conditions.

The first movement he made was to get out of his chair and turn the lamp full on the portrait of Roxana. That portrait appeared to him to bloom with an increased splendour and glow of life. It was as if it had been drinking up during all this time a subtle incense of flattery, and now rewarded the worshipper with a smile of acceptance. The soul glimmered through the painted image as, in the Holy of Holies, before the High Priest, the soul of the God might have manifested itself in the idol. For it was an idol. This room was a temple, Olphert now perceived, conscious at the same time that his own imagination had shaken out hitherto unsuspected wings, and was soaring on a rather dizzy flight. And Pender was the priest. The atmosphere of his adoration and sympathy had been to the picture as the sun to the closed petals of a flower. The painted image had awakened as the flower awakens, with its heavy scent—passionately, greedily, under that burning, golden kiss—Roxana was radiant, was warm with an uncanny suggestion of quickening life.

The impression slowly passed; his mind, as if in reaction from the brief stimulus of some powerful drug, swung back to its normal balance; but not before he had said, "You seem to have fallen in love with her. At least—somebody has. And she, too, is in love, though I don't know quite what with. The desire of her lover, I should think."

Pender remained silent for a little, listening to the

wind. "Both brothers are in love with her in their different ways," he said at last.

"Yes, I gathered that. . . . You have found the right words—for your purpose (which is not what I should ever have guessed beforehand)—words at any rate that burn and exasperate, that seem, in their sound, to have something of the half-fulfilment of desire. They are curiously *not* what one expected from you. . . . How is it going to end?"

"I don't know. But what do you think of it?"

Olphert's dark eyes, behind their spectacles, were fixed penetratingly, yet uneasily, upon his host. "I find it hard to say. I haven't sufficiently collected my impressions yet. It is entirely different, at all events, from what I had expected. For one thing, you—you yourself—are extraordinarily not in it. . . . That is, unless I have been utterly mistaken, and it is *all* you."

"Why should I be in it?" Pender asked. "Besides, you said a moment ago I had fallen in love with Roxana —which would mean that I *was* in it."

"Not in any subjective sense. I discovered it only from your portrait of her. Of course, in the other way, you *are* everywhere—in the writing. But I imagined something different, as I say; something—— Well, what I expected was what, I suppose, you originally intended to do. This work appears to me to be entirely creative: it is not in the least a note, or a memoir: it is as much a work of imagination as a novel or a lyric."

Pender shook his head. "It is only that I have been interested, and that my interest, my absorption if you like, has in some mysterious way dragged me into the adventure. My consciousness seems to overlap, to be at times drawn into, theirs. I have myself played on the fiddle to Roxana, I have played so that I felt the music singing and crying within me, the way one does in a dream—as if every vibration of the strings were passing straight through my body:

and I have heard that fiddle in the distance, as I sat over my wine in a big, gloomy dining-room. I have got up heavily from the table, and caught sight of a huge crimson face scowling in the mirror as I passed in front of it. I have moved with clumsy stealth along the passage to stand outside a door—listening. I have been shaken during those watchings and waitings by the odious eagerness of suspicion, the maddening sense of impotency, the longing to act, and the fear of action. I have felt the torture of mingled hatred and desire; I have felt the lust of cruelty turn to the slobbering of a caress. . . . You can't imagine the thrill, the fascination, the excitement of it all."

His voice dropped, but his dark eyes had a restless fire in them—eager, burning—the light of some veiled thirst either of the body or the soul. "Now that the whole thing is passing beyond the period where the letters break off, it seems to draw me in farther and farther: I find an increasing difficulty in getting back."

He paused, and the Doctor's deeper voice sounded: "Getting back! Getting back where?"

"Here. Getting back to this—the present—my own ordinary life. . . . I begin; I go on for a time quite consciously; but afterwards—at some point—I lose control. And that is when my good work, my real work, is done. It is hard to explain very clearly, but in the end, when I do get back, there is a period I cannot account for—a blank period."

"You have not simply dropped off asleep?"

"If I have, who then has written the heap of manuscript I find before me? Who has been able to carry on my story, and to imitate so closely my handwriting?"

Olphert remained silent. He was thinking. He presently gave one of these thoughts utterance. "But there seem to be no breaks: it all goes on continuously—what you have written. There is no break either in the matter or the manner, and there should be, shouldn't there, according to your theory?"

"Oh, that is merely my artfulness. I have filled in the gaps, I have made my alterations, my guesses, my deductions: I have put two and two together: I have caught my own note, as it were, and covered up my tracks. I do all *that* in the morning."

The Doctor once more grew thoughtful. His eyes were fixed on the pile of manuscript lying on the table, and he might have been calculating how much higher it would have to rise before the end were reached.

"It's all," he said at length, "as I suppose you know, the very last thing in the world you should be doing just now. I mean this seriously. I did not realise, before, exactly what it was you *were* doing. If you take my professional advice you will not finish it: you will put it away for a year—at the very least for six months."

"You might as well say for ever," Pender replied, as he stooped to poke the fire.

His companion just hesitated. "For ever then. Give it to me as it stands."

Pender made no answer. It was, to him, hardly a point worth discussion. He had gone over all that side of the matter at an earlier stage in his adventure. He had gone much farther than that, gone so far, even, as to consider the possibility of there coming a day when he should *not* succeed in getting back. The possibility had presented itself. Fantastic, absurd as it might appear, he nevertheless knew it to be an actual risk—a risk to be taken or avoided with one's eyes open. And with his acceptance of it had arisen another question, a question as to what, in these hypothetical conditions—the conditions of his *failing* to return—would be left behind? Where, in truth, *was* he, when he was with Roxana? What part of him still haunted the present? In the country, he knew, examples were fairly common of persons who were "away"; and in such cases—in some of them, at least—a living body was left behind for proof. The thing was doubtless not the same, yet it presented too many analogies to be set aside as irrelevant. There *must* be something

that remained untouched by the process of transmutation (otherwise that shadowy stranger would be seated here now, talking with an unknown Olphert): not all within the crucible was turned to gold.

"You say your professional advice," he smiled, as he rose and locked up the manuscript in its drawer. "What would the other be?"

"I am your medical adviser only," said the Doctor.

"Did what I read to you, then, strike you as morbid, as showing any signs of having been produced under abnormal conditions?"

Olphert suspended his answer: he seemed to be weighing the question judicially—or it might have been that he was merely considering the possible effect of his reply. "The actual result, perhaps, the thing in itself, did not strike me as morbid—given the peculiar situation."

"What situation?"

"The situation of your people. They are waiting for something—something to happen: and they don't even know what is going to happen. All *that* produces an atmosphere of uneasiness, which affects one's nerves —very much as the approach of a thunderstorm does. The feeling of suspense—its prolongation—the increasing sense of foreboding—these things, I suppose, might by stupid people be called morbid. And I don't say they *aren't*, you know. Through everything there is a suggestion of something hidden—something hidden yet active, working its way out—something unpleasant, if not positively evil."

"There is a sense of danger, of course."

"There is more than that. I can't define what it is exactly, but it is certainly more than danger. It is largely a matter of atmosphere. And the effect increases, deepens very considerably as the thing goes on. The atmosphere becomes slightly tainted. . . . I mean—one imagines it at last as breeding or attracting a maleficent power. They seem, these people, to be

standing quietly, smilingly, on the brink of some crime." The Doctor had at last made out his deepest impression. "What *were* Roxana's relations with the younger brother?"

"I don't know: I only know that nothing has happened—yet."

"I don't like her," Olphert unexpectedly declared.

Pender's long, thin hands clasped and unclasped nervously. "What don't you like about her? Why don't you like her?"

Olphert shrugged his shoulders. "I liked her at first, I think—while you were reading: or rather, I didn't ask myself whether I liked her or not. But I'm quite sure I don't like her now. It is nothing anybody says. It is possibly not even what she says or does herself. It is her effect on the others—her influence. Let us put it that I can't take your valuation of her—which is simply her own. You don't know her, you see. You know her exactly as well as those two men who were in love with her knew her; but no better, because you have come under precisely the same fascination. I have an idea that the real Roxana was a good deal different. I have a curious distrust of her. I must have had it, subconsciously, all the time you were reading. . . . Do you remember Lycius and the lady Lamia?"

"You, I suppose, are Apollonius?" Pender sighed. "I always felt rather sorry for poor Lamia, and I shall certainly not forsake Roxana." He went to one of the bookshelves and took down a thick volume, while Olphert turned again to the portrait.

"She even *looks* to me now what I believe her to be," he said: but Pender had discovered what he was in search of, and he read aloud,—

"'He, by some probable conjectures, found her to be a serpent, a lamia; and that all her furniture was, like Tantalus's gold, no substance, but mere illusions. When she saw herself descried, she wept, and desired Apollonius to be silent, but he would not be moved,

and thereupon she, plate, house, and all that was in it, vanished in an instant.' "

" Yes. Well, I hope your lamia will do the same now I have descried her,"—and Olphert prepared to go. " I should leave her alone," he concluded, standing before the chimney-piece and gazing up at the pictured lady. " I *have* descried her."

" You seem to have forgotten the end of the story," Pender reminded him. " All Lycius got from the philosopher's interference was death."

" Not all. He was saved from the serpent, and there are worse things than death."

" How cheerful you are," Pender laughed. " And we don't even know that he *was* saved. She was a ghost, and his ghost may have joined her later on. Her spell had been already woven before Apollonius appeared."

PART VIII

THE THIRD PERSON

I

THE rain dropped from the eaves with a low, persistent splash as she stood before the mirror fixing her hat. The face reflected in the glass struck her as paler than usual; she even caught, in the setting of the firm mouth, an expression which displeased her; she was certainly not looking her best. But did that matter? She went to the window and gazed out at the hopeless weather. It was hardly a morning to choose for an unnecessary walk. It would mean, too, that questions would be asked, questions difficult to answer, even if one sacrificed the truth; but probably they would be asked in any case, and in any case the truth would have to be sacrificed.

Contrary to her expectations no challenge reached her, as she drew on her gloves and buttoned her waterproof in the hall. Her mother must be in the kitchen, or somewhere out of hearing. She closed the door behind her, and with umbrella raised descended the two steps to the street. It was only then that she perceived Adeline's inquisitive nose flattened against the pane, and knew that the challenge would be delivered on her return, if not by Mrs. Burton, at least by the inquiring child.

She forsook the road almost at once, crossing the golf links, and setting her face to the headland, two or three miles away. She saw nobody. Beside her the gray sea tumbled on the wet brown beach, the gulls rose in white flocks from each rounded hollow as she

reached it, and bedraggled sheep, nibbling at the sodden turf, watched her with a foolish curiosity as she passed.

But beyond the golf links she again took to the road. Here the grassy headlands, rising steeply on her right, were garrulous with countless hidden streams. Walking, too, was easier. She had promised to meet George Best here, and presently she came upon him, waiting for her, behind a projecting scarp of rock and earth. They stood close together in the middle of the deserted road, with the rain beating on her umbrella and on George's sou'-wester, uncertain whither to turn for shelter.

"What an abominable morning," she said cheerlessly. "I'm sure you must be soaking."

He shrugged his shoulders. The rain dripped from the brim of his hat; his face was wet with it; and two or three drops trembled on his eyebrows, and on his short, close-cropped moustache. It ran down his soaked waterproof. She had never seen anybody who looked wetter, and she wondered how long he had been waiting.

"We've chosen the most exposed road we could," she went on, speaking in the same grave, rather dull voice. "In the valley there would have been plenty of shelter."

"This rain would get through anything. . . . It was good of you to come."

Hardly a smile had passed between them. Both looked anxious and troubled. Behind the commonplace words this anxiety was distinctly perceptible; it was perceptible in George Best even more than in Norah; nothing, at all events, suggested that they had met here for their pleasure.

His eyes were fixed upon her face questioningly, uncertainly. "I've been along the road a bit. There's a kind of broken-down cottage farther on. There's no use in your getting wetter than is necessary." He spoke in a voice that betrayed acutely the nervousness he was trying to conceal. He was like a child who wonders if the expected guest has or has not brought him the hoped-for present.

"I never dreamt of its raining like this," Norah said.

"Rotten, isn't it?" He looked at her a little helplessly, almost pathetically. "It may clear up this afternoon."

Their conversation seemed to cling obstinately to this subject of the weather. His eyes from time to time sought hers, like the eyes of a dog doubtful of his master's favour; but having once looked at him, Norah gazed henceforth straight before her.

"Shall we try the cottage?" he murmured, and as she moved forward in silence he paced beside her.

They soon reached it—a shell of four bare walls, with the thatch still clinging to them, but the doors and windows gone. Surrounded by a dense growth of nettle and bracken and bramble, built on a steep bank above the sea, it stood there, in curious isolation, overlooking the gray mass of tumbling water which stretched out and out, to where the thickening atmosphere grew solid as a curtain, obstructing all further view.

She entered first, dragging her skirt recklessly through the tangle of fern and nettle and bramble which he would have beaten down with his stick. But having proceeded so far, she remained just inside the doorway, and in full view of the road, which she faced. Yet the interior was dry and clean. A heap of yellow fern stacked in one corner, some charred sticks and trampled ashes, suggested that children had recently used the place for picnicking.

"You'd better stand a little farther back," he suggested. "You'll only get wet there. Come into one of the rooms."

She shook her head. "I'm not going to hide, or do anything like hiding. I think we'd better go home. We can say all that has to be said on our way."

"It wasn't worth coming so far only to go home again," he urged nervously. It was almost as if he were afraid of being overheard, afraid of saying too much; but Norah's voice was perfectly cold and matter-of-fact.

"I don't know what you mean," she answered. "I never intended to stay out all morning."

He drew back, flushing. Norah did not see his flush, nor the doubt and trouble in his eyes. She was watching the wet, bare road. For a moment she had placed her hand upon his arm, but that was the only sign of tenderness she showed, and she withdrew it almost immediately. The curve of her mouth was very hard. It was obvious that she was the stronger of the two. Though her face was white, it revealed no sign of yielding to the emotion which was so clearly visible in the face of her companion, and there was again that mortal coldness in her voice when she said, "This kind of thing is no good, George. It isn't worth it. I've made up my mind on one point at least: I'm not going to do anything caddish."

Her insensibility, her whole attitude, seemed at first to bewilder him, and then to arouse a deeper feeling of wounded disappointment. "I suppose *I* am the cad," he said bitterly.

"It was you at all events who suggested this."

"Yes—and you agreed to it. . . . Suppose I go to him and tell him everything." He flushed again, with a quick shame at his own words, but she did not even turn her head.

"Tell him what?" she asked contemptuously.

"Tell him everything."

"I don't know what 'everything' is," she answered in the same tone. "To me it seems much more like nothing."

"I can tell him that you love *me*—not him," he muttered sullenly—"that you have always loved me—that we——"

"Are you so sure, then?" she asked.

He winced—and there was indeed something deliberately cruel in her question, coming, as it did, half in the manner of a taunt. From his face, he might have been struggling with the doubt that she appeared purposely, and with a kind of callous cynicism, to have

suggested. "Yes, I am sure," he answered huskily. "You have given me plenty of reasons to be sure."

"And you now propose to give those reasons to him?"

He did not reply. He did not understand. Why had she come out here to meet him, if it were only for this—if it were only to destroy everything, to turn everything to derision? He tried to speak, but there was nothing he could say.

"I've told you so often that I *do* care for him," Norah went on, in a voice absolutely devoid of feeling. She closed her eyes for a moment. It was as if she were merely thinking—thinking aloud.

"You don't love him," he muttered obstinately.

"Not—in that way. There are so many kinds of love. But I care for him all the same."

"And do you think that would please him?"

"It is all he wants."

"It's a lie," he cried, yielding at last to his anger. "It isn't all he wants. You've lied to him, and you've lied to me—you're lying now."

"Sometimes I think it is all I want, too," she finished half wearily, and as if he had not even spoken.

He did not answer: he turned away and stood with his forehead against the doorpost. She stood, too, in silence, watching the rain, which descended softly and continuously, like a gray mist that shut them in here together, as in some place utterly removed from the rest of the world.

"Is that why you met me—to tell me this?" he asked at length, speaking hardly above a whisper.

She turned to him with a languid sadness that revived all her beauty. "No. I don't know why I met you, George. I don't want to hide anything from *you* either: I do love you. I loved you from the beginning, though I tried not to. I loved you, and I tried to kill my love; to strangle it, to forget it, to bury it, even if I buried it alive. But I knew I had not killed it. I stamped the earth down on it, but I could feel it—

I could feel it moving in its grave. And then you came back here, and I did not care any more. I let it conquer me. But no good can come of it. I will not be a poor man's wife. I hate poverty: I dread it. I will not sacrifice everything I care for to a few months' happiness. I should not even *have* that happiness, for I should know all the time what was coming after. Neither of us could put up with the only life that would be possible to us—with the ugliness of it—the monotony—the degradation. We care for other things too much. We should end by hating each other."

"We could wait."

"Wait? Wait for what? No matter what you do, you will have to begin at the beginning. And what guarantee can you give me that you will succeed. Besides, I don't want to go abroad—certainly not to the colonies. It is easy to say we can wait, but we have nothing to wait *for*. There is nobody going to die and leave us a fortune. In the meantime, we are both fond of pleasure, of the kind of life that cannot be lived without money. I am not going to be a drudge in a small house. You have no right to ask me to be that. I am not going to have children if their father can't afford to bring them up properly. And even if I consented—ten years, five years from now, when I have waited and grown old in waiting, how do you know you will still want me? Women, in such things, I fancy, have a good deal more constancy than men, but how do I know that I shall even want *you*? In ten years you will be a different person—both outwardly and inwardly. In five years we shall have had time to watch each other change. Even suppose we kept our promise then, the whole thing would be utterly different. We should be dull, and bored, and lukewarm. There is nothing flatter than a stale affection."

Gradually, while she spoke, there had awakened in his face a look of dismay, which deepened at last to one of complete hopelessness. The fire in his spirit seemed to flicker and sicken under this prolonged stream of

cold water which she poured upon it with her remorseless reasonableness. He gulped something back that he was going to say, and she could see that there were tears in his eyes. Beaten, helpless, he appealed to her as he had not appealed in that brief struggle to overmaster her will. She had to fight now for a moment to keep back the answering tears that it would have been an immense relief to yield to. She kissed him quickly: she pressed her lips for a moment to his wet, cold cheek, but as he threw his arms round her she drew back from his embrace, and, as if he had learned his lesson, he made no effort to retain her.

She stepped out from the shelter of the cottage, and he followed. Once more they walked, but this time back towards home, steadily, silently, along the naked, rain-washed road.

"What have I done?" he asked at length, as she moved on, with eyes that never once turned to him, nor indeed looked at anything they passed. "It may be our last walk together, and—it is like this. . . ."

"I can't help it. Oh! can't you *see* there is no other way?" An indescribable weariness, almost a bitterness, pierced through her words, and as he made no reply, "Do you imagine *I* am happy?" she went on. "But it doesn't matter. Blame me if you like. Only you ought to blame what I was before—not what I am now."

"I don't blame you. I—I don't understand—that is all. It seemed to me we might be happy. Even now that is all I can see—the happiness you are wasting—for so little."

Her face was still averted from him, he did not know whether his words had any power to move her, or were merely empty sounds to which she had closed her ears and her heart, but he began again, with a blundering, pathetic attempt to talk reasonably, talk as she would have him talk. "I can't tell about the future: I can't see it—like you. I can't see anything but this—this that you are sacrificing to—I don't even

know what. Why should the future be more important than the present? Why are you afraid to trust me? You could—you could. . . . But you have changed. . . . Yesterday—ever since I came back—you seemed to think and feel as I did. And now you are thinking of something else, thinking only of your own safety."

She did not answer. He waited for her to answer, but she said nothing. Once she stumbled over a piece of loose rock, and he put out his arm to help her. For a step or two they walked on thus, and she neither resisted, nor seemed to notice when his arm again dropped to his side. And this silence was hopeless, desolating, unbearable.

"You want me to go—at once—this afternoon—without another meeting?" he asked abruptly, with a kind of harshness in his voice, that betrayed the effort he was making.

"Another meeting? You would *like* another meeting?" She turned at last to him, with a strange wan little smile of incredulity. "*Could* you go over all this again? Do you think it would make forgetting any easier?—and we must forget—that is the one thing I am sure of."

His face was white. He had stopped, and Norah stopped also, nearly at the same point in the road where an hour earlier they had met. "I don't think I can stand much more of it just now, at any rate."

There was a moment of silence. Then Norah's voice sounded faint and cold, "You want to say good-bye here?"

"Yes."

He waited, but her lips were set. And suddenly he caught her in his arms and kissed her roughly, and turned away, walking quickly back along the road they had just traversed. And still she remained standing there, not looking after him, facing indeed in the opposite direction, and with half-shut eyes, her hand resting on the broken sea wall.

II

THE sound of his footsteps had died away, he had disappeared from sight, before she moved on. She did not look up even then, or she must have seen, not ten yards above her head, leaning out from a shallow fissure left by a recent fall of earth and rock, a figure, which at one time had made a movement as if about to hail them, but now stood motionless, gazing after her, till she also disappeared from view. The watcher then descended and stood for a moment just where she had stood. It was a boy: it was Trefusis.

He had heard but a word or two; he had seen only that "single famished kiss," and Norah's face when her lover had gone; yet he felt certain, amid a cloud of dim uncertainties, that all was not well. He knew that these two should not have been out there alone together in the rain so far from home, he knew that they should not have spoken those words he had heard, he knew that they should have parted without an embrace, without a kiss; and it seemed to him as if a secret he did not want to share had been whispered in his ear, a secret he would have to carry about with him, like a burden, for ever.

It was the unlucky climax to an unlucky morning. Trefusis had awakened early, and a few beams of uncertain, watery sunshine had tempted him abroad while the snorers, the lie-a-beds, were still lost in earthly slumbers. With provisions in his pocket, and a fire in his heart, he had set forth, intending to walk to Fair Head, and spend some hours lying in the heather, working at his new drama. The spirit of this white-haired, rosy-cheeked poet was exultant. Had he not a book on the eve of publication? Had he not a great poetic drama (which would surprise Mr. Pender)

planned passionately in his soul? Was he not in love?

Not one line of *Grania and Costello* had yet been written, but in the imagination of Trefusis it was already a completed lovely thing. He confidently looked forward to bringing home at least the first act in a more or less finished state. It was to be in five acts, and in blank verse (Mr. Pender seemed to dislike rhyme); blank verse, with here and there a song.

Costello, the hero, the brave proud lover, the warrior youth held in captivity by Grania's cruel father—Costello with his swarthy sunburnt skin and eagle eye—you would never have guessed how closely he resembled Trefusis. And the harsh tyrant's daughter Grania, she, even in outward semblance, was very twin to Norah Burton. For the daughter of "Burton," as well as Mr. W. B. Yeats's *Deirdre*, had made an impression upon the odd, susceptible soul of Trefusis. It was a solitary little soul enough, compact of a strange maturity and an equally strange childishness, no part of it contemporaneous with his actual years. Most people saw only the maturity. Miss Tonie Ronayne's bulldog had recognised the childishness. Pender, though not so readily as Tim, had recognised it too.

But Trefusis was in love. He himself noted all the devastating symptoms with delight, and his passion was none the less tender for being rather carefully cultivated. It was at once delicate and ardent: it looked for no other fulfilment than might be vouchsafed by a not infrequent vision of the lady's beauty, and the much rarer delight of a chance word flung by her. Twice he had been permitted to carry her golf clubs. Memorable days. The lady herself, surely, was unaware of their glory, or she might have economised in caddies. The whole wonderful thing was hidden from her. "Love unconquerable; Love who wandereth over the sea and among the dwellers in wild places; no immortal can escape thee, nor any mortal." Trefusis

chanted the lines aloud; but he worshipped circumspectly. "The desire of the moth for the star" was his, and the star was so remote that the moth ran no risk of death, no danger even of singed wings. The only token would be *Grania and Costello*—a poetic drama, rather Celtic, in five acts, by Trefusis Heron. A token this, certainly, for in spite of his chivalry, in spite of his devotion, Trefusis had a horrible eye for "copy." He had it naturally; he had been born with the "literary taint"; and the foolish encouragement given to his efforts had developed it to an abnormal degree. If he did not look for sermons in stones, he at least looked for poems in them, and found them too. *Grania and Costello*, in five acts, with "singing women" and two poetic fools—a masterpiece.

Trefusis walked on sturdily, disregarding the lowering clouds, which seemed to be closing together miraculously in that windless air. The last tiny rag of blue was shut out: the misty drizzle, which had begun half an hour after he left home, had increased to a steady downpour, and still he had not reached Fair Head, though he had taken the upper road, which was shorter and much easier. It was a mud-splashed, bedraggled little poet who eventually emerged on that vast, empty plateau —hatless, coatless, drenched to the skin, sustained only by an amazing obstinacy. And the scene which met his eyes, desolate as winter, was gloomily, sullenly impressive. It was like a landscape on a forgotten world. Not a bird, not a sheep, was visible: nothing but vapour and gray rock and a dun colourless vegetation, splashed here and there with bright patches of treacherous, evil green. He passed by the edge of a tarn in which he had once bathed. Not a sound reached his ears but the sound of rain. It was a place, he suddenly thought, where a crime might be committed with impunity; nevertheless, he made his way across the gloomy expanse, avoiding the green patches, till presently the murmur of the waves reached him. He had started out with the intention

of walking to Fair Head, and to Fair Head he was come.

He advanced to the very edge of the cliff and peered down through the mist at the leaden waste of sea. Not a boat, not a gull, not a cottage, all along that rocky, desolate shore. He drew his note-book from his jacket pocket, where it had been reduced to a state of pulp, and let it drop over the edge. After examining his lunch he allowed most of that to follow the note-book, and phlegmatically ate up the remainder, for he recognised there was nothing further to do but tramp home again. Only he would go home by a different way, by the cliff's edge as far as it would take him: then he could climb down on to the lower road.

He trudged on, sturdy as a little bull, and once he had left the higher plateau behind him he began to feel more cheerful. It was really not so bad, and it would be jolly getting into a hot bath when he reached home. In the afternoon, beside the fire, he would play colorito with his father, or perhaps tiddleywinks, a rather favourite game with both of them. Presently he began to spy about him for a good place to make his descent, and after much slipping and scrambling, and the collection of a large quantity of mud, he discovered the landslip. He wondered when it had occurred. Quite recently, he decided, for he had been round this way not a fortnight ago. And there might be fossils. Trefusis's knowledge of fossils was of the vaguest, but he commenced a diligent, though unrewarded, search; and in the midst of it he caught sight of George Best and Norah coming along the road. Instantly he hid himself, planning to surprise them when they were just beneath him. . . .

Well, his surprise had failed. . . . They had surprised *him*. He walked slowly along now, pondering gravely on that surprise—that uncertain thing—that mysterious, dubious scene he had witnessed—trying

to fathom what it meant, how *much* it meant. He walked slowly, because he had no desire to overtake Norah; and when he reached the golf links he skirted them, still keeping to the road, till presently, on turning a corner, he perceived some hundred yards in front of him a female figure in a waterproof. He knew it was not Norah. It was smaller than Norah, slighter, but for a moment this was all he knew. Then she turned her head and he recognised Miss Richardson. His heart sank, for the recognition had been mutual, and Miss Richardson slackened her pace as if waiting for him to overtake her.

Trefusis did not like Miss Richardson. Among other things, she had once, at the Tennis Club, boxed his ears for spilling a cup of tea over her dress. But he was a polite boy, and never for a moment—or at any rate only for a moment—did he dream of darting away across the links on the pretext of being interested in events happening far out at sea. Even if he *had* done so, the plan would probably have failed, for Miss Richardson was not at all shy, and evidently she wanted to speak to him.

"Good-morning, Trefusis," she called out; and "Good-morning," Trefusis returned.

They walked on side by side. Miss Richardson, regardless of the fact that her escort was oozing rain-water at every step, dawdled; but she revealed an unexpected graciousness of manner for which Trefusis was thankful, even while it filled him with astonishment. She revealed, too, an interest in his poetry which she had never hitherto shown. But she revealed, most of all, a delight in his conversation, so unfeigned, so unmistakable, that the flattered poet began to wonder if he had not in the past utterly misjudged her. As boys go, Trefusis was not disagreeably vain, but he couldn't help forming the rapid conclusion that Miss Ethel Richardson must have taken a fancy to him. The remarkable suddenness of this fancy did not strike him as unnatural. Besides, it mightn't be so sudden.

After all, that painful episode of the spilled tea had happened more than a year ago. He had improved a lot since then. At any rate, he supposed so, though the principal change which occurred to him was that he had grown stouter; and he was rather glad there was no one there to overhear their talk. For Miss Richardson spoke to him quite as if he were grown up—as if, indeed, he were an extremely dashing youth; and it is to be feared Trefusis's responses, once he had recovered from his first shock, were couched in a form to bear out this reading of his character. His mood began subtly to alter; his spirits rose; and presently—such is human nature—he was laughing gaily.

They talked of many things—of Trefusis's poems, of his adventures that morning, of his prowess as a bather (Miss Richardson would give anything to be able to dive and swim the way he did), of various people they knew—and at last, quite casually, Norah Burton's name was mentioned. Miss Richardson had seen her in the distance, crossing the links. She must have been out for a walk. Nobody but Norah would dream of going for a walk round Fair Head on such a morning. But, of course, she was forgetting; Trefusis had dreamed of it. Hadn't he seen Norah? Well then, there was no excuse; he might at least have accompanied her home. Miss Richardson thought it was horrid of him. But men were all the same—in secret they every *one* of them looked down on women. And even if women couldn't do *some* of the things men did—couldn't dive and swim like Trefusis, perhaps—couldn't write such good poetry—still. . . .

Miss Richardson's artless prattle, sufficiently entertaining in itself, was somehow coloured, vivified, irradiated, by Trefusis's sense of her prettiness. She *was* pretty, and her face was very close to his under that umbrella which she had insisted should shelter them both, and which he now held over them. The whole thing had assumed the aspect of a romantic adventure, and he had a delightful feeling that he himself was

contributing a good deal to the gaiety and pleasantness of this rainy confidential walk. There was one moment especially, just when they were crossing the bridge, and had stopped to look down at the river running swiftly and with swollen waters beneath them—one moment when—when—he had very nearly kissed her. . . . It was not till they had turned the next corner that he suddenly awoke from his dream.

What awakened him ? A too direct question, perhaps. At all events he became conscious that Miss Richardson's hazel eyes were fixed upon him in a gaze which pierced to the inmost secrets of his heart. He stammered, and a deep blush, like some burning signal of shame or guilt, spread over his freckled face, and over his forehead, to the very roots of his tousled white mop. His small, well-shaped mouth closed tightly. He spoke to Miss Richardson henceforth in the briefest and least communicative sentences he could find. In vain did she resort to her former tactics ; in vain did she evoke before him the dazzling barrier of sex, from behind which to play bo-peep. Her charm had vanished, and he said good-bye to her with an abruptness which aroused in the lady a temptation very similar to the one she had yielded to when he had spilled her tea.

III

As she drew near to the house, each window in it appeared to Norah like an eye pressing upon her a persistent interrogation, and she knew that from one or other of them her mother would be watching. Mrs. Burton, nevertheless, remained invisible, and Norah might have believed she had entered unobserved had she not known that much practice behind curtains and blinds had rendered Cousin Nellie singularly efficient in this kind of stalking. When she came downstairs, after changing her wet things, she discovered her mother there, solemnly waiting for her. Cousin Nellie, moreover, was alone in the room (alone except for Wopsey), she was not even reading, and Norah immediately perceived that the hour of explanation had arrived. She braced herself for it, and for the questions she had already anticipated. "Where have you been? What have you been doing—in all this rain?"

Norah looked round for a book or a paper, but saw only *The Church Missionary Gleaner*. For some unfathomable reason her mother appeared to have cleared everything more frivolous away. She answered that she had been out.

In spite of her air of nonchalance, however, she could hardly expect such an answer to succeed. The rain, her prolonged absence, her rather surreptitious manner of departure, had evidently, when all combined, aroused her mother's sharpest suspicions. Mrs. Burton, having done little during the past hour or so but await her daughter's return, was not likely to be put off so easily as this.

Yet she paused, and for a moment or two studied Norah's face. "I know you were out," she then said austerely. "I want to know where you were, and what you were doing?"

"I was out for a walk," Norah went on; and, as if

to clear up the last remaining obscurity, "The rain wasn't nearly so bad as it looked."

"Don't talk nonsense," her mother snapped, austerity giving place to a more human note. "It has never ceased raining since breakfast. Who were you with?"

"I was by myself. I met George Best, and we came home together: that is the whole wonderful story."

"I see." Mrs. Burton's tone expressed all that she actually *did* see, and perhaps a little more. "How long do you propose to go on with this kind of thing?" she inquired coldly. "How do you expect it is going to end?"

"I don't know what you mean," Norah replied.

"You know perfectly well what I mean," said her mother with increasing feeling, "and I should like you to tell me plainly whether you intend to marry Rex Pender or not?"

"I don't know what that question means either, I'm afraid."

But this self-possession was more than Mrs. Burton could put up with. "Don't pretend to me, miss, that you don't understand," she scolded, raising her voice considerably. "You're not an idiot."

"I don't—really," Norah smiled.

Cousin Nellie's bosom rose and fell. Prevarication, fibs, positive denial—*anything*, she felt, so long as it was accompanied by an appropriate shame and contrition, might have been pardonable: but this complacency, this brazen effrontery, she could not forgive. It was the attitude of the abandoned. It was also impertinence, deliberate and undisguised.

"The way you are behaving is outrageous," she declared. "I couldn't have believed it of a daughter of mine. You may be quite sure you haven't heard the end of it either. . . . Actually going out to meet him in all this downpour! *Somebody* is certain to have seen you, and to tell Rex."

"I am quite willing to tell him myself," said Norah. She even laughed, though not particularly mirthfully. "I assure you it won't worry him in the least—no matter who tells him."

"Won't worry him!" Cousin Nellie exclaimed. "And you consider *that* a satisfactory state of affairs! You should be ashamed to admit such a thing, even if it is true. . . . I can tell you, your father wouldn't have looked on quietly while I ran about with another man when *we* were engaged. He was jealous of *everybody*. . . . And this idea of having Miss Foy at Ramoan —I suppose you approve of this also—a most delightful arrangement, I must say—giving herself airs and poking her nose into everything."

Norah sighed. "My dear mother, there's no need to be silly. You know perfectly well that I had nothing whatever to do with his asking Miss Foy."

"The more shame to you then: you *should* have had something to do with it. You should have something to do with all he does."

Norah laughed again—half tragically, half genuinely. "But you know I haven't."

"I know nothing about it," Mrs. Burton answered bitterly. "How should I know what's going on, and what isn't. You take precious good care never to tell me. For all I am told, I might be the most distant acquaintance, instead of your mother."

"I'm sorry I can't invent things," Norah said, with the slightest possible shrug. "But if there *is* nothing to tell, what am I to do? I'm afraid it simply amounts to this, that Rex and I aren't sentimental: though I really don't see how even that concerns anyone but ourselves."

Apparently, however, it concerned Cousin Nellie. "You don't want people to talk about you, I suppose! And people *do* talk. You aren't living on a desert island. It was only yesterday that Mrs. Richardson asked me when you were going to be married; and I know from the *way* she asked me, that she meant something. I don't blame her if she did. The date of the wedding ought to have been settled long ago. Nobody knows *what* you are waiting for."

"How trying that must be," Norah murmured ironically.

" And in the meantime you seem to think you are free to gad about with George Best ; while Rex, apparently, is quite indifferent. It's a nice state of things, whatever way you look at it. I'm thankful to say your father and I weren't like that when *we* got engaged."

" Things are not the same as they were in your day and papa's," Norah explained patiently.

" Aren't they, indeed ? Well, the sooner they're altered, then, the better. I shall speak to Rex myself."

This was the idlest of threats (Mrs. Burton's last conversation with Pender not having been of a nature to encourage her to seek another of the same sort), but Norah gave her mother a long, steady look, before which that lady's volubility was suddenly reduced to silence. Dreadful words, spoken with a horrible coldness and deliberation, reached poor Cousin Nellie across the room. " I should advise you not to interfere, mother. You are rather anxious that I should be married to Rex, and if you do anything foolish, you may take it from me that it is most unlikely I ever shall be. At present I intend to marry him, but I am going to arrange things in my own way, not in yours, or Mrs. Richardson's, or anybody else's with whom you may have been discussing the matter. I'm sorry to have to speak so plainly, but it is your own fault, if you *will* interfere. Of course, you can please yourself : I am simply warning you—warning you what consequences you may expect if you persist in meddling." She paused, and then added more kindly, " So long as *we* are both satisfied I don't think you need worry."

Cousin Nellie long before the end of this unnatural speech had utterly subsided. It struck her as dreadful, as indeed positively wicked, but she was afraid, if she persisted, of provoking something worse. She did not even notice how white and tired Norah's face was, for all its calmness and determination. " I'm sure I hope he *will* be satisfied," she sniffed tearfully, " though I don't see how it can be for long—that is, if he expects you to have any heart."

IV

Cousin Nellie, nevertheless, really knew very little. She was suspicious, and she was extremely uneasy, but it was mostly guess-work, and her alarm would have been increased a hundredfold had she by some impish power been granted a peep into the mind of a certain small poet—the very last person in the world to be associated with such matters—as he sat, on the evening of that same day, in a large black leather arm-chair, opposite his father, in the peaceful seclusion of the Heron library.

Though it was not much after eight o'clock, it had grown dusk, and two lamps were burning. The rain, which had not ceased all day, still beat stormily against the windows. Except for this, however, and for an occasional movement on the Professor's part, the silence was unbroken.

The Professor was busy, and Trefusis was busy also, though apparently he was doing nothing. These two, who talked much when both were idle, ever forebore from interruption when one or other happened to be occupied. Between them there existed that perfect harmony of spirit which is independent of speech. Though their minds might be absorbed by the tasks before them, they could feel, subconsciously, each other's presence, and this sense of companionship would be broken if either, no matter how noiselessly, were to get up and leave the room.

The Professor was at present lost in a philological problem: he was reviewing the book of a colleague. Trefusis was thinking of the conversation he had had that morning with Miss Ethel Richardson, and his thoughts brought him scant pleasure. Off and on, for many hours, his mind had been busy with Miss Ethel Richardson—and also with Norah Burton, and also

with George Best; while, a little beyond these three, loomed the somewhat ghostly form of Mr. Pender. Trefusis felt uncomfortable.

He was, no doubt, a guileless boy, susceptible to flattery, not at all averse from posing in the limelight, but he had a certain astuteness which Miss Richardson had underestimated. Her method, successful up to a certain point, had in the end proved too crude; it had lacked the patience of art; she had not covered up her tracks sufficiently, and Trefusis, after his first brief dazzlement, had perceived these tracks. Now, in his arm-chair, at leisure, with his head thrown back, a frown on his forehead, he saw them all over the place —large, clumsy, unmistakable. What he would have liked to see, but what he could not see, was a motive for such strange behaviour. Miss Richardson was supposed to be Norah Burton's friend. Perhaps her only motive had been curiosity—vulgar curiosity, Trefusis added—but again, and very much more probably, perhaps it hadn't. Certainly she had tried to pump him; and this disagreeable process had not been suggested by any remark of his own; it had originated in a previous suspicion.

Yet far more than by Miss Richardson's duplicity, Trefusis was troubled by Norah Burton's. He had heard nothing, he had seen little, yet there had grown up in his mind a conviction that Norah Burton and George Best must be lovers. That dalliance might go so far as to kiss without swearing subsequent fidelity, did not occur to Trefusis. There was, indeed, at Ballycastle, not a great deal of dalliance of any kind —either legitimate or the opposite. Moreover, what little existed was mainly confined to the shop-keeping class, whose affairs were conducted on the golf-links, by the roadside, usually on Sundays, and always with the utmost openness. Such affairs did not attract comment; they were simply unfortunate natural phenomena, like worm-casts on croquet lawns, and Mr. Mills, it was to be presumed, kept an eye on them. But one

did not encourage Mr. Mills to gossip. Trefusis's experience of love, of engagements, was very circumscribed indeed.

Nevertheless, he knew that Norah Burton was engaged to Mr. Pender, and that in the present drama, no matter how one looked at it, Mr. Pender was likely to be the victim. What ought he to do? How could he betray Miss Norah Burton, and yet how could he not betray her without sacrificing Mr. Pender, who had been kind to him, kinder far than any of the Burtons had ever been? The only person who might be sacrificed with complete impunity was the shameless Miss Richardson—a treacherous creature, of unfathomable duplicity, and horribly dangerous. . . . What ought he to do?

The lamplight lit up the snowy whiteness of his father's soft, loose hair and beard. To Trefusis he seemed a very comely old man, and this thought, somehow, threw into blacker relief the baseness which these others had been capable of. For it *was* baseness —all of it—dissimulation, hypocrisy, lies, and broken promises. That old man opposite him was wise and good, but his wisdom, Trefusis dimly felt, was not of a kind to help him here—he could not appeal to him for advice. For that matter, he could appeal to nobody. He thought of Dr. Olphert, who was Mr. Pender's friend, but Dr. Olphert hated the Burtons. It seemed to Trefusis that he had floundered, or rather been thrust by fate, into the midst of a dreadful morass. First, he had been an unwilling spy; then, though to what extent he knew not, he had been an unwilling informer. The double rôle was particularly unattractive, yet he felt he should have to add to it a third before all was done. Whatever happened, Miss Burton must be kept safe: yes, though that should mean even the betrayal of Mr. Pender, who was innocent. If he had given away, however inadvertently, Miss Burton's secret, the least he could do now was to warn her of her danger.

He rose from his chair. "I'm going out, father. I'll be back in half an hour."

Professor Heron glanced up, three quarters of his mind still lingering over what he was writing. "Yes. Isn't it raining? Don't get wet." His bright eyes dropped again to his unfinished article, while he chuckled softly over a passage of exquisite irony which an economical editor subsequently crossed out.

Trefusis knew that his father had not realised how late it was, but he did not think it necessary to remind him. The Professor was scribbling hard, and at the same time trying to keep a book open in three places at once, nevertheless a warning followed Trefusis to the door. "Put on your galoshes, dear, and don't be late for dinner."

"No," Trefusis replied.

They had dined barely an hour ago, he reflected, so that left him plenty of time—twenty-three hours, to be exact—and the glimmer of a smile passed over his face.

He sat down at the foot of the stairs and obediently pulled on the prescribed galoshes (his father lived in a perpetual dread of wet feet, so Trefusis was rather frequently to be seen in these floppy articles); he pulled up the collar of his waterproof, and opened the hall-door.

It was an appalling night. The rain was coming down in torrents, and all was dark as pitch. Trefusis splashed along, keeping to the middle of the road, down the steep incline of which a stream of water ran babbling like a mountain brook. Fortunately, the lights from the houses enabled him to avoid a few of the deeper pools, but near the hotel, where the lights were brightest, he plumped into a positive lake, which topped the friendly galoshes and took him well above his ankles. Trefusis said, "Dash it!" and skipped out again.

He reached the Burtons' house, which was not far from the corner, without further mishap, and fumbled

in the dark for the bell, but before he had found it a maid opened the door. She surveyed the poet with surprise. Trefusis asked for Miss Burton, but refused to come in.

"Miss Adeline has gone to bed," the maid annoyingly informed him. "She was sent to bed early for not doing her practizeing."

"I don't want Miss Adeline," Trefusis answered loftily. "I want Miss Norah."

The maid, after treating him to another stare, disappeared.

When she emerged from the drawing-room she was followed by Norah, who saw a drenched boy in waterproof and galoshes, with a black glistening oil-skin hat in his hand, dripping on the hall mat, under the dim, hanging lamp.

"Why, Trefusis, you look like a diver! Come in and take off your wet things."

He looked indeed a forlorn enough little figure as he stood there, and he blushed crimson when he answered, "I must speak to you by yourself. It is private."

She laughed, mystified by his solemnity. "Well, come into the dining-room then: there is nobody there. I'll light the lamp while you're taking off your coat. You *must* take it off, or you'll be dripping all over our best furniture. What a frightful day it's been."

Trefusis took off his coat, but forgot about his galoshes, though they squelched with water as he followed her. Norah, having turned up the lamp, regarded him with curiosity, a smile still lingering at the corners of her mouth. She knew he was a rather odd boy, and as he stood there, with his wet freckled face and solemn eyes, and that shock of white hair rising straight from his forehead, she could not imagine what errand might have brought him. She begged him to sit down, and Trefusis obeyed, but, face to face with her, in a position intimate as his dreams had ever planned, he found it impossible to say a word. Norah

unconsciously helped him when she again made a remark about the weather.

"It was very courageous of you to venture out. Weren't you afraid of being drowned?"

"I got wet this morning, too," Trefusis said. "I got drenched then, because I had no coat."

"That was silly of you, wasn't it?—I mean, to go out without a coat. . . . It has been pouring all day."

"I went out early, when I thought it was going to be fine," Trefusis answered. He looked at her, and his mouth pouted extraordinarily: he looked at the lamp, at the wallpaper, he flapped the elastic of his garters: then he said guiltily, "I came home along the headlands. . . . I—I saw you."

Norah had suddenly ceased to smile, and a bright scarlet dyed her cheeks. She was, in fact, very greatly startled, and her eyes—like Miss Richardson's—would have pierced straight into the soul of Trefusis, had he not apparently been engrossed in the pattern of the carpet.

"I went out early in the morning—before breakfast," he continued miserably. "I took a note-book with me. . . . I was going to write. . . . I went all the way to Fair Head. Then, when the rain got so bad, I turned back. I stopped at the landslip to look for fossils. It was there I saw you—down on the road—just a little below me."

Norah removed her gaze from Trefusis and stared at the wall beyond him. There was a brief silence before she asked, "Was it about this that you came round to-night?"

Trefusis gulped inaudible words. He had forsaken his garters, and fumbled now with the corner of his jacket. "I saw you saying good-bye to George Best."

Again there was a silence, while Norah rapidly thought. She knew, of course, by this time, what he meant, but it was difficult to decide how she ought to take it, or what his object was in alluding to the

matter at all. Still, she must say something, and say it quickly, for her mother, whose curiosity was infinite, might come in at any moment.

"Thank you for telling me," she began, and even as she spoke the words a consoling voice whispered within her that she could trust this boy—otherwise he would hardly have been there. Besides, she divined as he sat there, divined suddenly and with an amazing clearness, an amazing certainty, that he liked her—liked her rather wonderfully.

"Mr. Best is an old friend of mine," she went on quietly. "We were once very close friends." She paused, not sure whether to tell him anything more, or to leave it at that. Her eyes never left his face, but Trefusis did not look at her. Yet she felt convinced, more and more convinced, that her secret was quite safe.

Next moment, however, Trefusis had shattered this false dream of security. Without raising his head he spoke in a low, dejected voice. "Miss Richardson suspects something. I told her I had seen you. That is why I came to-night. I didn't mean to tell her—I didn't actually tell her—more than just that—but I know she guessed. She asked me questions and I didn't answer them."

Norah drew a breath that was just faintly audible. She had at that moment a bright brief vision of Ethel Richardson "asking questions."

"Well, it can't be helped," she said.

As for the first time his eyes were raised to hers, she smiled—beautifully—adorably. Trefusis at the sight of that smile could have fallen on his knees at her feet, could have fallen at her feet and kissed them.

"It doesn't matter," she repeated gently. "But thank you for telling me, and not somebody else."

"I'm sorry," he whispered. "I didn't understand till it was too late, till I had let her see. I'm sorry."

She had a temptation to question him further, even to ask him if he had told, if he were going to tell Mr.

Pender, but she resisted it. She let him go, uninfluenced by any appeal, unbound by any promise, untroubled by any explanation, any denial. There was something in his simple loyalty, in his delicacy and candour, in his sense of honour, that she would not profane. She felt a sudden disgust with herself, a disgust with Ethel Richardson, a disgust with her mother, a disgust even with George Best.

PART IX

THE WAY OUT

I

THE memory of Pender's manuscript, and of the conversation which had followed on the reading of it, remained with a strange persistency in Olphert's mind. He would have liked to talk it all over with somebody—somebody from whom one might expect a hint, a spark of enlightenment—but who was there? To Pender himself he had made no further mention of the matter; in fact, during the past three or four weeks they had seen very little of each other, though this was not, the Doctor felt with a certain soreness, through any fault of his. Perhaps it was not Pender's fault either. Olphert, indeed, was quite conscious that all he had to do to re-establish the old intimacy was to pass through the door his friend had held ajar for him. But this seemed impossible. The mere thought of it was repugnant to him. So—though with reluctance, with misgiving—he had been obliged to watch the door closing again, and had found himself shut out.

But shut out from what? He had moments of impatient reaction when he tried to dismiss the whole thing as a piece of charlatanism, a grain of superstition carefully cultivated for the sake of its cheap romance. Yet this contemptuous attitude failed quite to meet the case. It seemed, somehow, merely an evasion, a confession of incompetence. And, at any rate, the matter refused to be dismissed; it kept cropping up again at all kinds of odd moments, just as it had cropped up now, for instance, while he paused before his

window, and stood there, apparently watching some sparrows taking a dust bath in the middle of the road.

That story, that memoir, that amazing chapter of family history, must be uncommonly well done to have produced upon him an effect which here, in broad daylight, it annoyed him a little to remember. It was not as if, in that way at least, he was at all impressionable. Ghost stories, even in his infancy, had never thrilled him. He was too sceptical, too materialistic. He frowned as he suddenly caught himself up. Why did he keep on thinking of the thing as a ghost story, when there wasn't a ghost in it, not the slightest allusion to one? What *was* there in it, then, to produce these singular mental aberrations? It was Pender who had kept on talking about ghosts. And how much of all that had he really meant? The Doctor abruptly ceased to speculate, and strode out of the room, for he had caught sight of Miss Foy on the other side of the road, standing motionless, staring at the house, as if awaiting a signal from some confederate within.

He opened the hall door wide. "Come in—come in," he called to her, as she stood hesitating, yet gazing at him. "What are you afraid of? Fee-Fo-Fum, I suppose—or Bloudie Jacke?"

Miss Foy apparently made up her mind, for she crossed the road. "I—I was afraid you'd be busy," she murmured apologetically. "And——"

"Well, I'm not," Olphert answered, grasping the small, black-gloved hand firmly, since Miss Foy, even now, looked as if she were on the point of flight. He drew her indeed almost by force across the threshold. "Come in: I'm not busy: in fact I was wondering if there'd be time for nine holes of golf before dinner."

"Well, then, I mustn't keep you," Miss Foy exclaimed. "I know how you're worked."

"Overworked, Miss Foy, overworked," the Doctor corrected her dispassionately, but at the same time opening the door of his consulting room. "A visit

from you, however, is better than playing golf against Bogey. Sit down and tell me all about it."

"All about what?" Miss Foy asked, breaking away from him in alarm.

The Doctor laughed. He pushed forward an arm-chair, in which, after a further slight hesitation, Miss Foy sat down. "I don't mean as a patient: I don't mean I think you're ill. But you know you haven't just come here to amuse me and cheer me up. That would be too much to expect. Friendless, 'into the dangerous world I leapt,' and friendless I suppose I shall slide out of it again."

He, too, had seated himself, and much closer to Miss Foy than this lady desired. She wanted plenty of room—room to withdraw, room to escape, for the Doctor always seemed to take possession of her as a cat of a mouse. "But indeed no," she hastened to contradict him. "I'm sure——"

"Never mind," Olphert interrupted. "I won't be sentimental, and I dare say I've as many friends as I've time for. There *is* something, however, that you came to see me about—isn't there?"

"I'm not at all sure that I ought to have come," Miss Foy temporised feebly, glad, at the same time, to see him pushing back his chair, and not staring right into her face from a distance of three or four feet. She remembered how he had always seemed to fill up her little parlour at home, and how he had bullied her into doing things she didn't want to do, and how impossible it had even been, now and then, not to like being bullied. "I'm not sure *what* I ought to do," she went on, turning away from the horrid titles of the books close by her elbow. "But you *did* suggest, Dr. Olphert, if you recollect, that—that I was to look after Mr. Pender. And—it's just because of what you then said that I'm here."

"I guessed as much," Olphert replied. "You've been friends with me for I don't know how many years, but three or four weeks of Pender's society is enough

to sweep all that into oblivion. Well, what's the matter with him ? "

" I don't know. I don't know, indeed, that there is anything the matter with him. . . . It is only that I am anxious."

" H'm." The Doctor did not appear to share her anxiety. He took out his pipe, but instead of filling it, began to tap it gently against the palm of his left hand. " Why are you anxious ? " he asked with a smile. " What's happened ? When I last saw him he was looking fairly well."

" Yes—yes—I know."

" What's he been doing, then, in the meantime ? "

" You know what he does," Miss Foy answered. " He read his book to you."

Olphert laid his pipe down on the table before him. He seemed to take in this reply very slowly. " His book ! " he at last repeated. " Has he been reading it to *you* ? "

Miss Foy shook her head. " No, not that." Her eyes were lowered, her hands folded in her lap. " But—Is it good for him ? " she suddenly brought out, raising her gaze to search her companion's face. " What *is* this book ? Why is he so absorbed in it ? Why, after he has been shut up with it, does he look so—strange, and white, and—I don't know what ? There are times when I have spoken to him and he hasn't even heard me."

" He's absent-minded," Olphert replied. " But there's nothing very alarming in that, is there ? "

" He has told me about this book," Miss Foy went on, " a little about it—not, I think, quite knowing that he was telling me—and—I don't like it. . . . He talked as if she was *there*—actually living now—there, in the other room—waiting for him."

" Who ? As if who was there ? "

" The—the person he is writing about."

" Roxana ? "—the Doctor dwelt on the name for a moment thoughtfully. " Of course, you know, her

picture *is* there," he said. "He was probably talking about that."

"I dare say I am nervous," Miss Foy persisted, with a kind of quiet obstinacy. "But I, too, sometimes, at night, have a strange feeling that—he is not alone. I felt it last night especially. It was after the servants, after Mrs. West, had gone to bed. The whole place was quiet—*too* quiet, somehow, to be natural. It came over me—I can't describe it. But I was afraid. Afraid for *him*, you understand. I determined to go to his room, but when I was half-way down the passage I had to stop. There was nothing there, of course—nothing except that horrid feeling. . . . I don't know how to tell you—but it was as if his room, as if all that part of the house, had been shut off—as if there were some kind of barrier I could not pass. I'm not ashamed to own—it will perhaps make it more real to you—I'm not ashamed to tell you that I had to wait there in that dim light, which seemed worse than darkness—wait there and—and ask for help, before I could go on. I did at last get as far as his door, but there was not a sound. I listened, and—and, somehow, I *couldn't* turn the handle and look in: I couldn't even knock: I—I just came away."

"But, my dear Miss Foy, it seems to me that it is you, not Pender, who require looking after. If you're going to be like this, I don't see how you'll be able to do very much for him." The Doctor's voice, even more perhaps than his words, expressed his disappointment.

"I know, I know," Miss Foy hurriedly admitted. "I know it was very foolish of me, and—very wrong. I'm not like that usually. It was, believe me, quite exceptional. And indeed I'm not afraid for myself—but for him."

"You were afraid for yourself then," the Doctor said simply.

"Perhaps I was. Yes, I suppose I was. But—but—I think we are protected, if we ask to be protected.

And he—oh, he *likes* it." Her voice thrilled suddenly to the horror of this last idea. "It is that that is so dreadful. Oh, I know he does. It is becoming more and more the only thing he cares about. You can see it in his eyes. When he is with us—I mean, with ordinary people, with the ordinary things of life—he seems half asleep, and bored——"

"Well, you mustn't bore him. There's no need to bore him. *I* don't bore him."

"And Norah Burton!" Miss Foy pursued, ignoring this little egotistic flourish. "Why is she so seldom with him now? What has come between them? What good is she to him? Perhaps it is his fault; but she might do so much, if—if she cared."

Miss Foy's lips trembled; her face was suddenly distorted; but before Olphert could put in a word of encouragement she had recovered herself, had dried her eyes hastily, and replaced her glasses.

"I'm not going to be silly about it, anyway," she announced firmly, even with a hint of crossness, such as she might have displayed to a refractory pupil. "Only, I felt I ought to tell you—that it was my duty to tell you."

"You haven't told me anything I didn't know already," the Doctor returned impassively, "except about yourself. And you mustn't be alarmed: that will do no good."

Miss Foy did not answer, but she looked at him as if she thought he was not being quite candid with her. "I—I don't want to say anything against Norah," she began, "but it ought to be so much easier for her to do something than it is for me. My position is so difficult. I am only there, really, because of Mr. Pender's kindness, and how can I do anything without —without intruding where I have no right to intrude? It is Norah's place. Besides, her influence is so much greater."

"Her influence be hanged," answered Olphert unceremoniously. "She hasn't any influence. How

could she have? She's not near him. She's ever so much farther away even than we are. She doesn't understand. She doesn't see—because she doesn't care a rap about him."

"Oh, she must care. She would care if she knew," Miss Foy cried, forgetting that he was but echoing her own words of a minute before. "You shouldn't try to make her out so heartless."

"I don't say she's heartless. I don't even think it," Olphert replied. "She's much too sound a person to be heartless. But her heart isn't given to Pender."

"It is: it must be," Miss Foy contradicted again.

Olphert waited a moment. He looked at his visitor, at that eager, so deeply moved, yet so helpless little lady, with a calmness which did not preclude sympathy. "Why must it be?" he then deliberately asked. "To do her justice, I think it would be not only physically, but morally impossible for a girl of Norah's type to be in love with Pender. After all, from her point of view, what is he? He's not beautiful; he's not young; he's an invalid who's not even decently, properly ill (his kind of illness, you know, is, for practical people like Norah, really damnably irritating); he takes no interest in the things that interest her; and, to crown all, he's—well, he's certainly peculiar."

Miss Foy rose. A faint flush had come into her usually colourless cheeks. "I am glad you have *at last* told me your opinion of him, Dr. Olphert," she said, with a dignity of which he would never have believed her capable. "Perhaps if I had known it a little sooner it would have saved me from wasting your time today. . . . And now I think I must say good-bye."

"And *that's* all nonsense," cried the Doctor angrily. In two strides he had planted himself between Miss Foy and the door, where he stood towering above her, though she still faced him boldly. "You can't possibly quarrel with me, you know; because, first, I won't allow it, and secondly, because you are quite aware that I *am* Pender's friend, and that every word I said

about him was true. What is it you object to? Is it because I called him 'peculiar'? Well, I'll take it back: I'll put it in a form you can't deny. I'll say he's a man who's in love with a ghost—a man who invokes a ghost to be his companion—who finds in that sweet company something which makes the company of living people stale and uninteresting. Do you think it sounds any better that way? To me it sounds worse. But at any rate it is what he is, and you know it, since the fear of it is what brought you here to-day."

Miss Foy wavered a moment; then gave in. Once more she seated herself, but not in her former chair, this time she took a hard upright one, the nearest that offered itself, while Olphert, running his hand up through his thick black hair, gazed down at her, and wondered if after all it had been much of a kindness to send her to Ramoan. Not if she was going to take things like this. Yet how could he have foreseen it? Women were so confoundedly immoderate. Of course, if one cared for a person—in that way—it must be rather wretched to have to share him with Norah, to have to share him with Roxana, to be conscious at the same time that one's own share was nothing—nothing but a bone of indifferent kindliness thrown to one's hungry need.

"I don't know what to do," Miss Foy was saying. "I *can't* speak to Norah. She wouldn't believe me. She'd laugh. She'd tell him, and laugh again."

"We must wait," said Olphert, ceasing to mount guard over the door. He crossed the room, and sat down on a low, leather-covered table, where he remained with one foot on the ground and the other swinging slowly backward and forward. "We must wait, and trust to time."

"But what is he *doing*?" Miss Foy now almost wailed. "What does he do when he shuts himself up in that dreadful room for hours and hours?"

"He's writing a memoir," answered the Doctor

sardonically. Then he added more kindly, "You exaggerate it, you know, a lot. All writers are like that—more or less: live in the clouds."

"But a memoir! A family memoir!" poor Miss Foy quavered. "It seems such a simple, harmless, ordinary, humdrum kind of thing. Why should it make him like this?"

"It doesn't. It's Pender himself who's like this. He's not simple, or ordinary, or humdrum."

"What is he then?" Miss Foy demanded, as if ready now to face any truth. "Why are you so guarded? Why can't you tell me plainly?"

Olphert shook his head. "I'm guarded only because I don't know myself. I can't tell you what he is. I'll tell you a story, a Chinese story, instead."

He lifted his hand as Miss Foy was about to interrupt him. "I'm not trying to evade your question: my story has a distinct bearing on the case. It's about a boy who had a passion for drawing cats. One day he was rambling about the country, when he came to an old deserted temple. The walls inside were bare and smooth, so he at once began to draw his cats all over them. Then, when it grew too dark to see any longer, he lay down in a corner and fell asleep. But in the night, through his sleep, he heard screams and the sound of fighting, and when he woke up in the morning an enormous demon rat lay dead and torn on the stone floor. He looked up and saw all round the walls his cats just as he had drawn them—except that their mouths and whiskers were dripping with blood. . . . There is a resemblance, isn't there? Pender seems to share the gift of that Chinese boy: his cats come to life. Therefore it would be wiser for him to stop drawing them. . . . But, above everything, my dear old friend, you mustn't allow this imaginary gift to frighten you. I mean, don't again allow yourself to get into the state you tell me you were in last night. That won't do. Remember, I count upon you. And the gift *is* imaginary: there is no Roxana: there are

no ghosts. If there were, it would make the whole thing infinitely simpler. All he would have to do would be to shut up the house, to shut up the room. But it seems to me that that would *not* meet the present difficulty. He must fight this out, not run away from it. For if he runs away the enemy may follow in pursuit—the imaginary enemy, for again I assure you ghosts have no objective existence."

"But we read in the Bible——"

"I know—I know. We read, too, in the Bible, of angels—we read far more of angels than of ghosts—yet nobody, not even the Canon, ever fancies he sees an angel, ever fancies that a house—or shall we say a cathedral?—is haunted by one."

"But why shouldn't he go away?"

"I have told you why. He can go away as soon as he feels that the others have gone—that they were never there—that a graveyard is the quietest, safest place on earth."

"Well, I won't keep you any longer," Miss Foy murmured with a sigh—a sigh which evinced no great confidence either in the wisdom of the Doctor's plan, or in his optimism. She rose once more to her feet, and this time found her path unobstructed. But Olphert followed her, catching up his hat from a stand in the hall as he passed. "I'll see you to the end of the road," he said. "And don't forget, any time you want me, late or early, if you send a message I'll come at once. It's a pity there isn't a telephone."

II

PENDER, however, was not nearly so unobservant as he was supposed to be. He was quite aware of Cousin Nellie's watchful eye, for instance ; he was quite aware that he had not seen so much of Norah lately ; he was quite aware of Miss Foy's secret misgivings, and of the Doctor's mingled curiosity and half-impatient scepticism. Probably, had he been in a position to overhear the conversation which had recently taken place between these two, nothing either of them had said would greatly have surprised him. He knew what they thought about him, and though he did not like it, he had begun to accept it as inevitable : why, even Trefusis seemed to have grown mysterious and reserved in his manner of late. The only person who remained unchanged was the Canon. The Canon accepted him ; the Canon saw nothing to arouse curiosity, suspicion, or anxiety ; the Canon's society was rather a precious refuge just now—something beautifully unexacting, so that more and more Pender felt inclined to bless that simple and guileless old heart.

But if the Canon was proving a good friend to him, Miss Foy was proving a disappointing one. She would not see that all he wanted was to be let alone. She worried about him, worried in silence, which was somehow worse than if she had spoken ; for he guessed everything she left unsaid, and at the same time found no opportunity to justify himself. More and more in fact, as the days passed, Miss Foy presented the rather woebegone appearance of a person watching a procession of unpromising and obscure happenings, any one of which may be the prelude to disaster. It was this that had made him mention to her just now that he was going out to meet Norah Burton. That at least was something she would understand ; that at

least was something highly normal, and therefore highly desirable. The faint smile which accompanied this last reflection might have been found by Miss Foy rather less reassuring, but fortunately she was not there to see it, and at any rate it disappeared as quickly as it had come, while he hastened on along the dusty, windy road.

He had been walking for perhaps twenty minutes, and had nearly completed his journey, when he saw Norah descending the steps from the post office. She waved him a brief greeting, and then turned aside to drop her letter into the box.

"You're earlier than I expected," she said as he came up. "I thought I'd meet you half way, but I haven't got very far."

"Let's go back now. Come and have tea with me. Come and sit in the garden. It will be pleasanter sitting in the garden: there won't be so much dust."

"But why——" Norah began. Then, as if it did not much matter where they went, she turned, and they walked back together.

"And now," he said, "tell me the meaning of your mysterious letter."

"Was it mysterious?"

"Very."

"Rex, I want to speak to you seriously."

He smiled. "Yes; so you said in your letter. That is the mystery. I mean, you always *are* rather serious, aren't you; so that this must be quite portentous."

As soon as he had spoken he was aware that his words had not been very happy, but he hardly knew what he was saying, for he felt only an acute suspense, which had never left him indeed since he had got her note. Why had she written? What important thing was there about which she must talk to him; which she must, by writing, prepare him for beforehand? What important thing *had* they to discuss together, except the one thing he dreaded? Behind Norah, behind her brief note, he had seemed to recognise the

influence of Cousin Nellie. He had never forgotten those words Cousin Nellie had spoken on her return from Scotland—spoken impetuously, but all the more sincerely. He could see her, he could hear her voice now: "You do not seem very eager to settle it." Could it be that, then? For what else was there? And he knew well enough himself, even without this prompting, that it ought to have been settled long ago. He had left it to Norah—at the beginning—as he had left so much else; and perhaps the moment had now come for her decision. He knew that his silence on the matter must have appeared strange, possibly more than strange; but he knew, too—and it was the thing of which he felt most certain of all—that though it had been easy to become engaged to Norah, it was quite impossible that he should ever marry her. It had not perhaps been impossible at first—he could not remember what it had been at first—but now it was impossible. Yet it seemed equally impossible to escape. What escape was there but one? He had changed, he supposed; he must have changed. Certainly the luke-warm apathy of the past—that attitude of indifferent acceptance—had disappeared. At this hour of trial the haze of unreality had suddenly melted, revealing a dark and tragic substance behind it. He walked on, staring at the vision which hovered in the air before him; nor did he, in his preoccupation, notice how prolonged Norah's silence was, nor how strained, and yet determined, was her face.

"Won't you tell me?" he began at last. "Hadn't you better tell me frankly, and have done with it?"

She looked at him curiously—looked at him as if she were aware of his nervousness though not of its cause. "I wonder if we have ever been perfectly frank," she said slowly, and the sound of her voice, a hidden intention in it, was like the touch of an awakening hand, and brought his gaze round quickly to meet hers in a long, mute interrogation.

"That means—you—think we haven't?" he

breathed, dwelling on the words, as if half fearful of her possible reply. "But frank about—what?"

"About *anything*. . . . I wonder if we can be quite frank now?"

"At least, we can try," he answered, forcing a smile.

"You know what I want to talk about?"

"I can guess, perhaps. . . . No, I don't know."

"You have guessed that it is about our engagement?"

"Yes."

"It has not been much of an engagement, has it?"

He checked the words he was on the point of uttering: he felt they must not be his words, but hers. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean that it was never very much alive, and that lately it has seemed to me almost, if not quite, dead."

"Dead!"

"That is how I see it. Dead but not yet buried," she added, with a momentary bitterness. "I want you yourself to decide."

"To decide? But—what has happened?" A gleam of hope, which rapidly grew bright, and brighter still, made it difficult for him to control his voice.

"Nothing has happened," she said quietly. "Whatever happened, happened long ago. I am still willing to keep my share of the bargain, if you want me to; but there is something I must tell you first, even though I can't help feeling you have already guessed it."

"I have guessed nothing," he answered eagerly. "You must speak plainly—quite plainly."

She was silent for a little: then she said with the utmost simplicity, "There is somebody I care for more than I care for you—somebody I have always cared for."

His relief was so intense that it left no room for surprise; yet he had suspected nothing of what she now told him, no gossip about George Best had reached his ears. "And you knew?" he said. "You knew from the beginning?"

"Yes, I always knew."

"Then why——" he began, but at once stopped. "Is it——" He stopped again.

"Of course you have a perfect right to know who it is. It is George Best. You have a perfect right to know also that I am not going to marry him. . . . I have behaved atrociously—I am quite willing to admit that—though I feel somehow more guilty to him than I do to you. . . . But I have not been fair to you either, and I am trying to be fair now. I have treated you badly: I have told you lies. If you want me to find excuses I'm afraid I can't. I haven't sufficient energy to invent them: or perhaps it is that I don't think you care very much whether I find excuses or not. I don't think you care very much about it in any way. If I had thought you did I might have behaved differently."

She allowed him time to answer, but as he kept silence she went on: "After all, the situation is more or less just as it was before. I have no intention of getting married to George, and I am willing to marry you. I don't understand why you should want me, but that is your own affair. It does not sound idyllic, I dare say, but it is a perfectly practicable scheme."

He avoided her glance: her frankness now, at last, was certainly complete, but it awakened in him principally a desire to end their interview as quickly as possible. "Why won't you marry him?" he asked. "You must forgive me, but is there any real reason?"

"Do you mean, does he not—— Yes, he has always wanted it. At one time I very nearly agreed—agreed to get married, at once, without telling anybody—it would have been the only way."

"I see."

"Then," she went on steadily, "if you see, I need perhaps say no more. There is no more, indeed, *to* say, since you have decided."

"Since *I* have decided?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "I, if you prefer it. . . .

I don't think I shall come any farther, Rex. I will leave you here."

They stood for a minute or two by the gate of an empty corn field. To Pender the whole thing was bewildering, and curiously enough, as he began to see it more clearly, to see it, as it were, from the beginning, his first feeling of relief, of escape, gave place to an increasing sense of spiritual depression. It had all, then, been false; the only feeling that had really survived, or perhaps indeed that he had ever awakened in her, had been greed. He looked at her, and then hastily averted his eyes. "You must let me walk back with you," he protested unconvincingly. "We are going to remain friends, aren't we?"

"If you want such a friend. That, too, is for you to decide. But at present I should like to be alone for a little. I want to think things over: nobody else knows, you see, but they must be told at once."

He had a swift vision of that telling—to Cousin Nellie: it would not be easy.

"Can't I——"

"No, no. I must do it myself."

"But can't you tell your father—leave it to him?"

She shook her head with a cold, strange smile. "He would find it a good deal more difficult than I shall. Don't worry, Rex: it will be all right. . . . And now, good-bye."

She held out her hand, which he took mechanically. He felt that probably, so far as she was concerned, it really would be all right. He did not understand her, and somehow the chief feeling he was conscious of towards her now, was that he did not particularly want to understand her. Next moment she had left him to pursue his way alone.

III

And he, too, would have to tell. This thought remained with him all afternoon, and was still present in his mind that evening, as he leaned back in his chair and lit a cigar. In a few minutes he would follow Miss Foy to the drawing-room and break the news.

All through dinner it had been on the tip of his tongue to do so, but with the servants in and out of the room he had decided to wait till later. He was conscious that his manner had been perhaps a little too light-hearted. Miss Foy would regard him as callous. She might even suspect that he had desired to be released. Of course she herself was bound, really, to be pleased by what had taken place—it simplified her own position so beautifully—but even with that, Pender fancied, she would be shocked. And to think of the trouble he had had to persuade her to stay on after that scene with Cousin Nellie! Well, she need have no further scruples now. He had reached this point in his reflections, he had risen from his chair and strolled for a moment to the window, when to his amazement he saw Cousin Nellie herself approaching the house. She was not alone; she was accompanied by Jack; but, even as he gazed, Jack left her abruptly, and disappeared among the trees.

Pender, too, hastily retreated. He *was* serious now. His first feeling was of sheer consternation—this untimely visit was the last thing in the world he had expected—but almost immediately his consternation gave place to a conviction that it was the best thing which could have happened: he would have to meet Cousin Nellie some time; his position was a strong one, and he intended to show unmistakably that it could never again be shaken.

Cousin Nellie entered the room tragically; she

ignored his smile, his greeting, his outstretched hand; she simply sat down and remained dumb.

Pender, too, found a seat. He tried a second smile, which had the alarming effect of causing Cousin Nellie to produce a pocket-handkerchief.

"Rex," she said, and again relapsed into a mournful silence, which, as the minutes passed, left him horribly at a loss.

It struck him that his cigar was out of place. It did not harmonise with the atmosphere Cousin Nellie had brought in with her; it suggested comfort, an already achieved consolation—possibly, in a rejected lover, even a certain flippancy. After all it *was* hard lines on Cousin Nellie. She had long ago, he was sure, quite forgotten her own share in this matter. And he rapidly speculated as to how far he might approach her on strictly business lines.

"Norah, I suppose, has told you," he said quietly.

Cousin Nellie regarded him still in silence—regarded him commiseratingly, with the deepest compassion. He wondered if it were obtuseness, obstinacy, or merely policy, but he determined to say nothing more till she herself had spoken.

"Yes, she has told me," Cousin Nellie breathed at last. "I came at once. . . ."

Pender had been asking himself how she *had* come so soon. She must have hurried dinner on purpose.

"I came to beg you not to believe what she says. She doesn't know her own mind. It would be quite wrong to take her at her word. What she says to-day she will regret to-morrow. . . . Rex, I want you to give me your authority to tell her that so far as you are concerned nothing has changed. . . . She will write—I will see that she writes to-night. You will get a letter in the morning. Nobody knows but me: we have not told her father."

Pender listened politely, but when she had finished he replied, "I don't want her to write."

Cousin Nellie gave a slight start. He saw that she

had been perfectly genuine. She was actually so keen on this plan of hers that she believed him to be keen also. She was wonderful.

"Norah and I aren't suited to each other," he explained as sympathetically as he could. "We never were: the whole thing was an unfortunate mistake. I don't really see that there is anything more to be said."

"You don't care for her then? You don't *want* a reconciliation?" Cousin Nellie's eyes had opened wide: her astonishment was painful: he could see that a house of dreams was tumbling down about her, leaving her shelterless and forlorn.

"Of course I care for her—exactly in the way she cares for me. We are friends; anything you like; except that one thing which we never were."

"Never?"

Pender had a moment's compunction. "Well, *she* never was. At any rate it's all over now. It was over before I came back. I tried to persuade myself that it wasn't, but I failed. I should have thought you must have guessed as much. From the beginning I suspected Norah was unhappy. I even put it to her once, some months ago, quite plainly——"

"Then *that*, perhaps, is the reason?" Cousin Nellie interrupted eagerly, but Pender could not afford to encourage even this flicker of hope.

"It is *not* the reason," he replied firmly. "If you want a reason there is a much better one—there are ever so many better ones. I am too old for her, too dull, too different. I don't like the things she likes. As my wife she would not have been happy."

"What is the particular reason you refer to?" Cousin Nellie asked. "Has anybody been talking to you? If you have heard any gossip about George Best——"

"I haven't. I have heard only what Norah herself told me." He waited a moment: then went on more persuasively, "You must admit that George Best is far more suited to her than I am. She is very much in love with him—at least I think so. At any rate he is

very much in love with her: why shouldn't she marry him?"

"Marry him!" cried Cousin Nellie indignantly. "How could they possibly marry? What are they to marry *on*? He has nothing. He is not even in a position to keep himself, let alone keep a wife and family."

"He can get a position, can't he? He is young enough. And you ought to be able to do a little for Norah."

"I!" Cousin Nellie ejaculated.

"Yes, why shouldn't you? What is the sense in keeping everything you have to give till you can no longer give it? In fact, with income-tax and death-duties as they are at present, from a merely business point of view it would be the height of folly. It would be much wiser to act at once, Cousin Nellie. I don't believe any more than you do in long engagements."

"*This*, I am afraid, would have to be a *very* long engagement," said Cousin Nellie stiffly.

"Not necessarily," Pender replied. "Not if you think it over, on the lines I have suggested. Besides," he added slowly, "I also intend to give them a wedding present—a handsome one."

Their eyes met in a long, strange, silent look, into which, more and more, a definite meaning passed; then Cousin Nellie's queer little eyes turned away. Her fingers fidgeted nervously. Her colour deepened. "*How* handsome?" she at last breathed—perhaps involuntarily.

Pender had not withdrawn his gaze; he did not withdraw it now. He mentioned the precise figure of his cheque.

It was evidently satisfying. It produced, indeed, a singular effect upon Cousin Nellie, for she gave vent this time to a few perfectly genuine tears. "Rex—you are so good—so generous—I feel ashamed. . . . But she would never——"

"She won't know, will she? It needn't come from me at all. In fact it couldn't. I am only doing what

I should like to do, but I must do it through you. We can arrange things then at once, without loss of time."

"But she would never believe that I——" Cousin Nellie began naïvely.

"Why? She doesn't know, does she, what you could or couldn't afford?"

"It isn't so much that—though of course there is that also. But even if I *could* afford it, she would think I——"

"If it comes from her father? Think it over. Talk it over with him; between us all surely we can find a way."

Cousin Nellie rose, and seeing this, Pender too got up. Impulsively she embraced him, planting on his cheek a warm, tear-damped kiss. "All the same, I wish she was going to marry you," she whispered generously. "I *know* she would be happy. She isn't good enough for you."

To this sudden outburst of affection Pender did not respond. He merely asked her how she proposed to return home, and if he should accompany her.

"Jack is waiting for me," she replied. "He promised to wait an hour. . . . They are all *odious*," she suddenly burst out uncontrollably. "I had to bribe him even to do that. Yes, I had to promise to pay him—my own son. He said he wasn't going to wait out there all that time for nothing. I don't know who they get their characters from. I'm sure it isn't from me." And Cousin Nellie's tears fell afresh.

Pender saw her to the hall-door. He whistled, and presently through the dusk the red glow of Jack's cigarette became visible.

"Good-bye, Rex," Cousin Nellie said, hastily drying her eyes. "I'm sure you can't want to speak to him after what I've just told you."

He didn't. He didn't, for that matter, particularly want to speak to any of them. Cousin Nellie pressed his hand. She descended the steps and hurried down the drive, while Pender re-entered the house.

IV

But he did not remain indoors for long. A restlessness, "a spirit in his feet," led him, after he had talked for half an hour with Miss Foy, to visit Dr. Olphert. The Doctor was out, but Pender waited for him—he had not seen him for nearly a fortnight, and he supposed he had better tell him about this breaking-off of his engagement. Yet when the time came, when the Doctor returned and they sat smoking together, he did not mention it: already the whole thing was receding from him, with something of the rapidity of a dream. . . .

But his feeling of restlessness remained. He understood, indeed, what it presaged, and when, by-and-by, it swept over him in full force, he rose from his chair. Olphert also rose. "If you are going, I'll walk back with you—part of the way at least."

They came out into a soft moonlit night, and with the opening of the hall-door the sound of the waves reached them, the low back-wash of the water at full tide.

"I shouldn't overdo it," Olphert counselled unexpectedly, and as if he had read Pender's unspoken desire. "Miss Foy was telling me about the hours you keep. I've warned you before, you know, more than once."

"I've been keeping excellent hours for the last few days. . . . And I've done nothing else but keep them: I haven't even tried. . . ."

"Why?"

"I don't know—except that my impulse was in eclipse. While I was talking to you to-night the eclipse passed: I want to begin again."

"Well, remember what I say. Miss Foy is anxious about you."

"I know she is. And I know why she is. It is simply

because one night I happened to have been working later than usual, and she discovered me—or rather I discovered her, coming downstairs in the dawn, and looking very scared."

"She says she heard something."

"I don't know what she heard. Probably she had been dreaming. I'm always as quiet as a mouse. However—I really *have* practically reached the end now. I should have finished the thing before this, only the conditions are so queer."

"Were they ever anything else?" Olphert growled unsympathetically.

"Possibly not, but before, they were favourable; now they aren't. I don't think they want me to go on."

The Doctor hesitated: he would have liked to ignore this speech, but in the end he could not help asking, "Who? Roxana?"

"Roxana in particular; but—oh—all of them. There is a change. They are beginning to feel my presence—or rather it is beginning to worry them. They know I'm there—that *some*body is there—a watcher, a listener—it is as if at any moment they might *see* me, and then I don't quite know what would happen. . . . At all events they are uneasy, they are on their guard, with the slightest sign upon my part they would become actively hostile. It is the strangest thing. I feel, now, uneasy myself, inclined to hide behind curtains, to be on *my* guard. But I'm outside. I'm definitely *not* one of them. I've discovered that. And now there is the double excitement—the excitement of waiting for the end, of getting to know—and the excitement of the danger."

"You create your own danger," said the Doctor truculently, "or rather, you are doing your best to create it."

"You mean, they can't possibly reach me as we are—that we're on different planes—that they can't get at me even if they *do* see me?"

"I mean nothing of the sort," snapped Olphert. "The whole thing is a farrago of nonsense, a tissue of moonshine. But the moon was always poisonous. The danger begins when *you* begin to believe—seriously. There is no other danger: there never was, and never will be."

"Don't you think I believe now?"

"It's certainly not for want of trying if you don't. . . . It really is annoying, you know—I mean, after all I've told you. . . . It seems so senseless. . . . But I suppose there's no use arguing about it."

"I don't think, you see, that you've ever quite understood," Pender expostulated gently.

"Haven't I? If I hadn't I should hardly be taking it seriously now. Your case, my dear fellow, isn't without parallel, though you might like to fancy it unique. I dare say you have read some of Le Fanu's tales. . . . *In a Glass Darkly*. . . . Well, he behaved in much the way you do—sleeping half the day, and writing all night. He wrote in bed, with a lamp on the table beside him, in an old dark silent house in Dublin, keeping himself awake with strong tea. Naturally all the horrors he was inventing began to grow real to him, and in the end probably frightened him a good deal more than they ever did his readers. He was a little worse than you, perhaps, for he reached a stage when he wouldn't stir out of the house till after nightfall. But he paid for it—he paid for this charming manner of life—as sooner or later you will pay for it, if you persist. The human brain is a delicate thing—a very slight mishap to it may result in making the whole world hideous—may even open wide some door into hell."

They had nearly reached Ramoan gate by now, and before either of them spoke again they *had* reached it, and were standing there, looking through the trees, which seemed to surround the house with an atmosphere of stillness, of stagnation, that shut it in like a high wall. To Pender this sense of an invisible barrier was

positive, almost tangible. He had a feeling that if he took a few steps forward now he would vanish instantly from view, would pass directly into that other world which he knew to be awaiting him. Its fascination was so strong as to prevent him from offering to Olphert the customary invitation to come in.

But Olphert, somehow, did not to-night particularly want to come in. There appeared to him, for the first time, to be something definitely forbidding in the very aspect of the place. It had an appearance of loneliness, of gloom, of concealment. It might have been the scene of a crime, if crimes ever had any particular setting. Yet he had never received this impression from it before. It was morbid, silly, he told himself; his stomach must be out of order—and he resolved to take a couple of pills before going to bed.

"Good-night," he said, as Pender pushed open the heavy iron gate and stepped inside.

"I wish you had finished that confounded book," he added, knowing that all his words were wasted, and fixing his companion with a moody reproach.

"I'll perhaps have finished it when you next see me," Pender replied, already a little absently. And the gate closed behind him with a low, dull clang.

"On Sunday afternoon?"

"On Sunday afternoon, if not before."

The Doctor walked a dozen yards down the road and then stopped. He looked round quickly—but Pender was not there.

PART X

THE CLIMAX

I

THE Doctor got Miss Foy's note before he started out on his rounds, but he had a busy morning, and it was after one o'clock when he reached Ramoan.

He found her sitting down to lunch, and took the place that evidently had been laid on the chance of his turning up.

"I'm sorry for being late," he said, "but I couldn't possibly come sooner. How is he? What upset him?"

Miss Foy was fidgety and vague. She peered at her old friend across the table with the air of a nervous conspirator. "I don't know that he's exactly ill," she replied, speaking in an undertone, though they were alone, and the housemaid had received special instructions not to wait. "I mean, I think he's better. He doesn't know I've sent for you. . . ."

"But if he's in bed—— Or is he out?" the Doctor wondered.

"Oh, no, he's in bed; he was asleep when I went to him a few minutes ago. I think, perhaps, all the same, you'd better not go up. . . . Not till I've told him that I've sent for you."

"Why *did* you send for me then?" asked Olphert with gathering perplexity. "Was it simply to talk about him?"

Miss Foy looked troubled, and the Doctor hastily added, "Of course, it's all right. I mean, I'm delighted to come. It's only that I don't exactly understand—if

he *is* in bed, and not feeling very well—why I shouldn't see him ? "

" Perhaps I'd better tell you first what happened," Miss Foy murmured, dropping her fork, with a sudden clatter, from a rather trembling hand. " Then you will be able to decide what you ought to do. . . . He met with an accident last night—or rather, this morning."

Olphert looked up quickly. " An accident ! " he repeated, with a slight frown. " What kind of accident ? "

" I think he must have fainted," Miss Foy explained. " All I really know about it is that he fell, and in falling managed to strike his head against the woodwork in some way—I don't quite know how."

" Was he hurt ? How did you find out about it ? Did he tell you ? " Olphert questioned. He kept his eyes fixed on Miss Foy's face, for her manner suggested that she had a secret thought which she was loath to communicate.

But Miss Foy did not return his gaze : she stared obstinately down at her plate. " No," she replied to the last question. " And I don't think he is much hurt —though there is a bruise on his forehead, and I was a good deal frightened at the time."

" Does that mean you aren't frightened now ? " Olphert asked. Then his manner relaxed, for he saw that Miss Foy was really upset, and that he was only flurrying her. " I'm glad, at any rate, you told me about it," he said. " I suppose he had been sitting up late, as usual ? "

" It was very late," Miss Foy replied. " Indeed it was broad daylight, or not far from it, when I went downstairs."

" You heard him then ? You heard him falling ? " the Doctor remarked, as casually as possible.

Miss Foy laid down her knife and fork : she had ceased to do anything but crumble a bit of bread, and she sat looking, not at Olphert, but at the wall opposite

her. "Yes, my room, you see, is just over his study. I must have been asleep for a long time, when suddenly I wakened. I don't know what disturbed me, but it must have been a noise of some sort. I lay listening, and was beginning to feel drowsy again, when I thought I heard a cry, and then a noise, not very loud, but dull and heavy, as if some piece of furniture, perhaps, had been overturned in the room below. It startled me, though I knew the room was Mr. Pender's, and that he might have fallen asleep, and on waking simply have upset something. I did not get up, because the last time—when I went down to see if anything had happened—he was not pleased. So I lay on for a few minutes listening for him to come upstairs. He is very quiet, but I fancied I should hear him. I heard nothing, however, and I began to get uneasy—he might have upset the lamp, you know—and just to satisfy myself I at length *did* get up, and went downstairs. I tried his door, but it was locked on the inside, and that really frightened me, for I didn't think it was his habit to lock himself in. I knocked, but could get no answer. I didn't want to make a noise and waken the servants. After all, he *might* be asleep in his chair. Still, the locked door frightened me. I thought of getting Mrs. West, and then, luckily, I thought of the windows, which would probably be unlatched. I went out and round to the side of the house. The birds were beginning to chirp, and this somehow made me feel less nervous. There was a heavy dew on the grass, and as I had only a pair of woollen bedroom slippers on my feet it felt very cold and wet. . . . I was right: a window was open. The curtains were drawn, but one of them had been partly torn down and I could see into the room, where the lamp was still burning; but it was not till I was actually stepping inside that I saw Mr. Pender."

"On the floor?"

"Yes. He lay on the floor, face downward, beside an overturned chair. One of his hands still clutched the edge of the curtain, which he had partially torn from

the pole. He lay without moving, and in the first shock I thought he must either be dead or have had a fit. I turned him over and saw a bruise on his forehead. He must have struck his head against the edge of the window-seat. I was just going for Mrs. West when he opened his eyes. . . .

" But he looked ghastly. I got him some brandy, and presently he recovered. In fact, after five minutes or so he was able without any help to go upstairs to his own room, so that nobody in the house knows anything about it. I went to him a little while after he had got into bed, but he had fallen asleep—he must have fallen asleep almost at once. He has been sleeping ever since, so I haven't been able to ask him what actually did happen."

" It's much the best thing he could do," said Olphert, drawing a pattern on the table-cloth with the handle of a spoon. " To sleep, I mean. . . . All the same, this silly business of sitting up half the night must definitely be stopped. I can't understand a man like Pender—when he has been warned so often—being such a fool. It's well he only upset a chair : it might, as you say, just as easily have been the lamp."

" I was frightened," Miss Foy went on, " and I sent that note to you. Afterwards I began to wonder whether I shouldn't have waited. I thought he mightn't like it—mightn't like anybody to know what happened. But at the time he seemed rather dazed. He said nothing to me beyond a word or two of apology. He didn't even ask how I had got there. I don't think he realised anything very clearly."

" And you think, really, I'd better not go up to him ? "

" I think so. . . . Somehow, I feel it's as if—as if I had betrayed his confidence. . . . Couldn't you come round to-night—just in the ordinary way ? I'm afraid it's giving you a lot of trouble, but I feel sure it would be better."

The Doctor nodded. " Just as you like. It doesn't

matter for a few hours, I dare say—especially since he's asleep. In the meantime I'd rather like to have a peep into that study of his, if you don't mind—just to see exactly where and how it *did* all happen. You will be able to show me."

Miss Foy rose at once. She could not herself see how an examination of the study would help, but she led the way, while the Doctor followed. As they crossed the threshold she turned to him with a half nervous, half questioning expression on her face.

"It was over there—by the window—I found him. . . . You can see where the curtain has been torn. I must get Mrs. West to mend it this afternoon."

Olphert nodded absently.

He stood quite still for a minute or two in the middle of the room; then he sat down in Pender's chair; then he went over and stood by the window, pulling aside the curtain a little, standing behind it, and looking, not out, but towards that portion of the room he had just left. Miss Foy watched these manœuvres with an interest which verged on trepidation, for the Doctor's behaviour struck her as more like what one might expect from Mr. Sherlock Holmes, perhaps, than from a respectable family physician.

"You surely don't think anybody tried to break in?" she at length asked nervously.

Her question roused Olphert from his rather intent reverie, and he laughed. "No, I don't. I'm quite certain of that at least. There was no one here but Pender himself. Show me exactly where he was lying when you found him, Miss Foy—the exact position he was in."

Miss Foy pointed to the spot, and described the whole scene over again as accurately as she could.

"Then he *was* facing the room. If so, what did his head strike against when he fell? This chair was overturned—so. If he overturned it in falling, could he have hit his head against the leg? It doesn't look like it, but I can't see any other explanation."

He suddenly became aware that his reconstruction of the occurrence was producing a far from tranquillising effect upon his companion. He hastened to reassure her. "I imagine it happened in this way," he said. "He was probably tired to begin with, but instead of going to bed like a sensible man, he sat down and worked for several hours. Then, feeling he could do no more, and very likely feeling that he had done too much, he walked over here to the window for a breath of fresh air. He was standing at the window when he was seized with a sudden faintness. I don't suppose he had eaten anything since dinner; he had probably smoked a great deal; it is no wonder he felt faint. He caught hold of the curtain to steady himself; then he fell, knocking over this chair. The whole thing is as clear as daylight"—and Olphert, with his hands in his pockets, strolled to the fireplace, where he stood for a minute or two gazing at the portrait of Roxana.

"They're a lovely bunch," he remarked sardonically. "Couldn't we find him a few more, and make a little chamber of horrors when we're at it?"

"I think myself they look rather crowded the way they're hung," Miss Foy agreed. She was surprised, nevertheless, at this odd change of subject, and still more by the glare of cold hostility which Olphert had turned upon the portraits—a glare hardly warranted by mere æsthetic disapproval.

"Crowded! Crowded's no name for it," the Doctor exclaimed disgustedly. "You can't get away from them. They're all over the place. Two of them should be burned, and the third locked up in the lumber-room."

"Do you really dislike them so much as that?" Miss Foy wondered timidly.

"More than that—a great deal more," Olphert replied. "They're bad pictures, and ugly subjects."

"Ugly?"

"Hideous. The old fellow's got a pious, respectable devil in him, Roxana's got a smirk, and the young one

a leer. Whatever became of them in this world, they're all in hell now."

Miss Foy, a little disturbed by this outburst, gazed at the unfortunate pictures in silence.

"We must get him to clear them away," Olphert went on in the same tone. "I would as soon think of living with the nightmares of Rowlandson as I would with these precious family portraits. Spiritually, I should say, they're about on the same plane. What a room like this requires is something bright and pleasant, something broad and bold and free—not these grimacing death-masks. An early Van Gogh, a Cézanne—I wouldn't trust him now with anything but a landscape or a fruit-piece."

Miss Foy, more and more bewildered, felt vaguely that she ought to stand up for Mr. Pender's family, but the Doctor's denunciation overpowered her. "You will come to-night, won't you?" she breathed faintly. "I would ask you to dinner, but I'm afraid Mr. Pender might wonder where we had met."

"Yes, I'll come," the Doctor grunted. "He'll probably not tell me anything, but if he doesn't, that's his own look-out."

II

"Où sont-ilz, Vierge souveraine?"
VILLON.

PENDER, as a matter of fact, did tell him: he began at once, barely giving the Doctor time to settle himself in his favourite chair. "I expected you. You might as well have come to dinner. Miss Foy told me of your visit here this afternoon, and of all you did and said. A good deal of it, I presume, was said *for* her: at any rate, I did not contradict it."

"I had to tell her something," Olphert replied, "so I told her what I thought would disturb her least."

"I don't know that you succeeded: I don't know that she wasn't disturbed."

"Not nearly so much as she would have been had I backed up her own theory."

"Her own theory!" Pender repeated incredulously. "I don't believe she has a theory. Why should she have a theory?" He had begun to pace the room, with a soundless, restless step, but he now returned to his chair and to the fire.

"Do you mind if I speak quite plainly?" Olphert asked.

"I'm afraid that's impossible to answer beforehand. But say what you want to say, whether I mind it or not."

"Well, it is nothing very dreadful. It is only that of late you have been rather too much absorbed in your own imagination to be very conscious of anything else. Miss Foy has been living here for weeks, and she is neither blind nor deaf. On the contrary, like all nervous people, she is very sensitive to her surroundings."

"I see," Pender replied.

"What you don't see, I suppose, is that there has

ever been anything to alarm her, even were she ten times as sensitive as I say she is."

"Oh, how can I tell what will alarm her!" Pender answered, with a slight shrug of his shoulders. "She enjoys fussing over people. She thinks I sit up too late, and don't go out enough."

"Yes, she thinks that. She thinks other things as well."

Pender still seemed unimpressed. "I dare say I've been horribly selfish," he admitted absently. Then, without waiting for Olphert to reply, "I'm going to tell you what *did* happen last night. There is something else I have to tell you also. I intended to tell it to you yesterday, as a matter of fact. It is about my engagement to Norah Burton. It is broken off."

His eyes were fixed on Olphert as he spoke the last words, but the Doctor received the news with a rather disconcerting lack either of curiosity or surprise.

"Nobody knows yet but Miss Foy," Pender continued. "Naturally, I told her at once."

There was a short pause; then Olphert remarked, as if feeling that a remark of some kind was expected, "She said nothing about it to me."

"She wouldn't. It only happened yesterday afternoon, though it seems years ago."

Again there was a silence.

Olphert picked up the poker and began to tap at a lump of coal. "Why *didn't* you tell me last night?" he asked.

"I don't know. As I say, I intended to. But you weren't there when I came in, and afterwards my mind became more and more fixed on this—other affair. I wanted to get back. I could think of nothing else."

Olphert laid down the poker and turned his gaze upon Pender's face. "You look better," he said, when he had completed this scrutiny. "You look different."

Pender drew back into the shadow. The Doctor's speech annoyed him. It seemed like an ambiguous

comment on the breaking off of his engagement, and, if so, was in shockingly bad taste. "Different from what?" he asked impatiently.

"From what you were—from what you have been."

"You mean, you expected to find me ill—worse?"

"It may be partly that. . . . But you look—— You give me the impression of having turned a corner somewhere. I noticed it as soon as I came in."

"It is all fancy," Pender answered, still with a suggestion of annoyance in his voice. "You fancied I was ill—just as, now, you fancy I am better. I never *was* ill, in the way you thought."

"I don't quite understand," Olphert said.

"Of course you understand. And it is what has always made talking to you so difficult: I mean, talking with any freedom. I felt you were watching me, examining me, asking yourself questions, wondering if this and that and the other were a symptom, an indication."

"I assure you——" Olphert began.

"Don't. I shan't believe you. I knew all the time exactly what was passing in your mind."

"Is that why you have avoided me lately—until last night?"

"I didn't know I had avoided you."

"At any rate, you avoided mentioning the subject in which you were most interested."

"Yes—I did. On the other hand, you are the only person I ever *have* mentioned it to."

"That was rather a matter of necessity than choice, wasn't it?" Olphert said simply. "I am the only person there is. It is hardly a topic to be discussed with the Canon, or Trefusis, or Miss Ronayne."

Pender smiled. "Sometimes you made me feel it was hardly a topic to be discussed with you either."

"Because I couldn't, or wouldn't, accept it?"

"Because of your whole attitude. It was horribly chilling."

"I don't think that is either fair or true," the Doctor

returned calmly. "Whether I believed your story or not—I mean, whether I believed it in the way you wanted me to, or not—I at any rate never showed any lack of interest in it."

"Your interest was chiefly professional."

"I see."

The Doctor appeared a little offended, but Pender held his ground. "When you heard Miss Foy's story to-day, for instance, what did you make of it? It seems to have irritated you. You were irritated with me."

"I was irritated because it showed that you were absolutely indifferent to any advice I might give you. If I had thrown up the whole thing there and then I should have been doing no more than most people would have done with the same provocation. You forget that in accepting a patient a doctor at the same time accepts a certain responsibility, and that the patient owes him a little more than his mere fee."

"I'm sorry," Pender apologised. "And you knew I had been at the window for a longer time than you led Miss Foy to believe? You knew what I was there *for*?"

"I suspected. After what you told me about watching, about feeling inclined to hide behind curtains, I supposed you *had* been hiding behind one. I knew when you were talking to me last night that you were in a mood to be easily influenced."

"I wasn't. I was only in a mood to get back to Roxana's book. I had a feeling that it was all going to come beautifully, delightfully—that my sole difficulty would be to catch it, to hold it, not to let it escape me."

"And it did come?"

"Oh, yes—after a fashion."

"It wasn't, then, just so beautiful, nor so delightful?"

Pender hesitated. "Perhaps not. Perhaps—— But I had better begin at the beginning, hadn't I? . . . I told you that there had been a break, a kind of 'switching off': I can't express it in any other way. . . . I had held my ear to the receiver, but I had heard

nothing; there had been nobody at the other end—either that, or the wire had got entangled or broken. For several evenings I sat in this room absolutely to no purpose. The whole thing seemed to have finished. For two evenings, indeed, I did not even sit here; I spent them with Miss Foy; we played bézique: just the sort of evenings you would have approved of."

"I still approve of them," Olphert answered dryly.

"Then, last night, when I was with you, something happened. What it was I can't say. It was as if a spring which had got out of order, or was being deliberately held in check, had been released. It was as if the wire had been disentangled. I heard the call: I was 'through': I knew it: I felt it: I had never before felt anything so strongly. It made me, I'm afraid, horribly inhospitable—though it *was* very late, you must admit."

"I should have come in if you had asked me," Olphert said. "I *thought* of coming in—even though I knew you didn't want me."

"I wanted to get back here; I wanted to be alone. But when I did get back—I mean, when I came after leaving you almost straight to this room, and was going to sit down at that table—I hesitated; I felt inclined to go away again. . . . It wasn't just—somehow—what I had expected. I was sorry then that I *hadn't* asked you in. I didn't feel quite sure of myself, and I remembered—remembered things that had happened—not to me, but to others."

"What kind of thing?"

"Unpleasant things: dangerous things. . . . I knew, at any rate, there had been a change, a development. I hadn't just come back to where I had been before the break occurred. The other life, the under life, had acquired a tremendous momentum during my absence. I had missed a good deal. Moreover (for the first time), I hadn't to wait—not a second. When I entered this room it was as if I had walked open-eyed into a still quivering web. . . .

"Not that I saw anybody—the room at first sight seemed empty—but I knew they were there—not far away—perhaps just outside; and I felt—felt it with a kind of shock—that I must not be discovered."

He paused, and Olphert moved in his chair, though he still kept his eyes fixed on Pender's face.

"You might call it a warning, a premonition—oh, it was perfectly definite—I knew I must either go while I still could—now—quickly—or run a risk of actual harm—some positive attack, physical or spiritual. . . . I don't know how to describe my sensation except by saying that it was as if for the first time I actually, bodily, *was* there—there on the other plane, I mean—either that, or else that they themselves had bridged the gulf, had, by means of some increased strength—accumulated through me perhaps—passed on to mine. They had before this, as I told you, become aware of me, but they had never actually seen me. I had reached their consciousness only in the form of a suspicion, a sense of danger, a foreboding. They had not heard me, they had not seen me nor touched me, but there had been *something* which had made them uneasy, which had given them a feeling of being watched. It was no more than this: I had been veiled from them: they had never been quite sure. Last night on entering this room I passed clean through the veil, and I knew they could get at me."

"And you stayed?" Olphert's voice was carefully non-committal.

"I stayed. . . . I even locked the door—as a precaution—to make sure, I mean, that I *should* stay, and that we should have the field to ourselves. . . . I don't mind admitting that I wanted to go—but I somehow still more wanted to remain. I was afraid—I was in a mortal funk, if you like—but I was at the same time horribly curious, and immensely excited. I knew something was bound to happen. Was I to miss it? For I *should* miss it if I went—it would be

all over when I next came back. It might never come again, and I might never know."

"So you waited?"

"I waited. I spied. I hid myself behind that curtain there and watched."

"And they found you?"

"Oh, not at once. I had time to make out a little. I had time to make out even more than I had bargained for. I was not the only spy there. When I first entered the room it had *not* been empty. Behind another curtain was another watcher. . . . I was sure of it—I can't tell you how. But I knew—I knew. . . . And with that it occurred to me—very unpleasantly—that this second watcher might be there for *me*."

He waited a little, while his eyes seemed to search the shadow beyond Olphert's chair. "Who was he? I didn't know him. I hadn't expected him. I did not quite know what to do. I didn't like it. I was rather sorry now that the door was locked. I don't know what I should have done; I might perhaps have funked it after all; only somehow I could *not* bring myself to cross that room again, and fumble with the key. I had little time to make up my mind, however, for almost immediately the others came in. . . .

"They came in together from the garden. Tom Firbis had a cloak wrapped round him, and he wore riding-boots. He put his hat and his cloak over there in the corner. They were nervous—they were frightened—as nervous as I was. They may have been frightened merely because they were alone there together, because they had been left alone, which might point to a trap. Roxana was much the less afraid of the two. . . . Young Firbis was white—dead white. . . . And almost at once I knew that they *were* actually alone in the house—except for me—and the other—though there was perhaps a fourth (or a fifth, would it be?) who crouched in the darkness outside."

"You knew from what they said?"

Pender hesitated. The interruption seemed to leave him rather blank, and for a moment he stared at Olphert as if questioning in his turn. But presently, like a disturbed sleeper, he sank back into his dream. "The house was empty—was closed—the servants were not there. I can't tell you how I knew it. From what passed between them, perhaps."

"You mean they did say something?"

"Say something? Why? How could I, at any rate, have heard them, when there was only silence, an extraordinary silence, that somehow seemed old, and—and—no, not dead, but moving with an intense and hidden life."

"Still, if you could see them——"

"You think I *may* have heard them. No, they did not speak. But I understood, I perceived. And very little passed between them even later. They were too uneasy. I could feel that increasing wave of suspense, of positive fear—which yet was not *my* fear—I could feel it growing till the whole room was brimmed up with it, till it beat and throbbed in the air with the beating of their hearts. Firbis had got his fiddle—he had taken it from some little closet near the door—which must still be there, if we look for it. But he did not play. Roxana sat, not looking at him, but looking straight in front of her, and I was at one of the windows, hidden between two drawn curtains; and the 'other' was behind another curtain, which hung before that recess there.

"I shall never forget her—Roxana, I mean—that strange, pale, intent look, as if she were thinking her thoughts aloud—I had never seen her so beautiful, with her red smiling mouth, and dark sleepless eyes. The boy's face was twitching—twitching with anxiety, or something else—his nerves on edge, but strung up to see the thing through. No, they never spoke. For that matter they were listening. They had been alarmed; they had seen or heard something outside; they knew they were trapped; they knew what to

expect; they were listening—but they did not know when or how it would come. . . ."

"And then?"

"And then. Whoever *was* there, behind that other curtain, may have moved. A hand, some part of him, may momentarily have showed; I don't know. . . . But suddenly from the change that came into her eyes I knew that Roxana knew he was there. She was wonderful. Not so much as by the quiver of an eyelid did she betray herself: her lips never ceased to smile. She may have thought it was her husband—Edward—more probably she thought it was one of his spies—a spy or a bully he had employed. What she realised at all events was that they were not alone. Quite slowly and indifferently she got up and went to that desk. Her hands moved under the half-raised lid: then she turned to that white boy with his fiddle.

"The rest happened very quickly. She gave him something—something she had been holding behind her but in front of me—a long thin knife, or dagger—possibly she used it as a paper knife—but it was capable of being used as a weapon. And he used it: she made him use it. She pulled aside the curtain suddenly, and I saw the knife flash in that boy's hand—I saw a figure reeling and falling—a black figure—and the knife stabbing again and again, savagely, unnecessarily—I saw the hands beating on the carpet, and the knife left sticking in the last wound. . . . And—I too stepped out from my hiding-place. I had to: I knew they would come to me. I might, I think, have made them understand even then, but as I found myself facing them, looking into eyes that blazed, literally blazed with hatred or terror or despair, I had no power to speak. I saw the boy's lips twist back from his teeth, giving to his face a horribly rat-like expression—the ferocity of a cornered rat. It was that sudden proximity, that closeness to what actually was not, or should not be; its appalling reality, as of a figure in a dream all

at once flaming into powerful, menacing life, that paralysed me."

"They attacked you?" Olphert said; and Pender nodded, half-closing his eyes.

"You mean they——"

"I don't know. I saw nothing, I felt nothing. . . . The next thing I saw was Miss Foy. She had been dabbing at me with water: I was half drowned: and I saw even *her* very dimly. . . . That is all."

The Doctor was silent for a long time.

"You don't believe a word of it, I suppose?" Pender murmured. "But I didn't expect you to believe."

"You yourself," Olphert said, "probably believe in it less now than you did last night."

"I am going away from this house," Pender answered. "And outside—buried somewhere in these grounds, or downstairs somewhere under these cellars, there is a body, or what dust and bones remain of a man after so many years."

"You really think so?"

"I don't even see how I can publish my memoir."

"Your memoir?" The Doctor for the moment had forgotten about it.

"And bring disgrace upon a respectable, not to say pious, family."

He spoke with a playfulness which was largely assumed. He had not yet quite recovered from the effect of this vision, or nightmare, the shadow of which even Olphert now felt to be floating not far from them.

But he would not have admitted it, would not have admitted its reality at least. "All you need to do is to make a few superficial changes," he said, "and the whole thing becomes a romance. I don't know that you even need to do more than change the names."

"Still, I don't think I can publish it. . . . The laurels of Trefusis must remain undisputed, for I don't in the least feel as if I should ever write a second work.

My inspiration—if it was an inspiration—has departed as mysteriously as it came."

"But—you're not going to destroy it?" the Doctor expostulated. "The thing is too good for that."

"I thought you didn't like it?"

"I haven't said I like it. But I'm not such a fool as to pretend it isn't 'done,' or that there can't be good things which aren't in my line."

"It *is* done—practically," Pender answered. "I can write the last pages any time. I wrote some of them this afternoon."

"Will you lend me the manuscript—or would you rather read it to me?"

Pender shook his head. "No, I won't read it. I've had enough of that. But I'll lend it to you with pleasure. I don't want to see it again for six months. Then I may go over it, in other conditions. I shall be able by that time, I hope, to approach it more or less as a stranger—coldly and critically."

Olphert considered: his mind seemed to be swayed by two opposite interests, one of which was Roxana's book, the other Pender himself. "Mayn't that be disastrous?" he at last half reluctantly suggested.

"For me?"

"For the book."

Pender smiled dimly. "It's rather odd—your sudden concern for the book. I'm merely following your own advice."

"Yes. . . . I know. . . . And you really intend to give up this house?"

"I shall let it, or sell it, if I can. I shall go abroad for a while. I'll go before Christmas. The place is far too big, anyway. It costs a lot to keep it up."

"I didn't think that mattered."

"I don't suppose it does, particularly—but there's no use wasting money."

"And Miss Foy?"

"Miss Foy, I'm sure, will have no objection to wintering in a decent climate. After that, we shall see."

They sat in silence for a time: then Olphert said, "So Edward, after all, *wasn't* the villain of the piece?" And he looked up at the largest of the three portraits.

"He had to help afterwards," Pender answered softly. "He helped to dig the grave, I think. A curious scene—if we could only watch it. Roxana holding the lantern, the two men working by its light—the gritting of the spades. Roxana's face, surrounded by darkness, but lit up by the lantern light, would be worth painting. Roxana, who alone at that time had knowledge of the fourth life, which was already kindled. . . ."

"Her child?"

"Her child."

"It didn't live, you say?"

"Not very long."

"Perhaps it was just as well," the Doctor murmured, "considering that she herself was to die so soon."

"It is the only fortunate happening in the whole story," Pender said. "Think of the doubts, the suspicions—though I myself believe that Edward was the father. . . . And after Roxana's death there would have been no protector—no one to intervene between a young delicate child and a black old man with rage and hatred in his heart. . . . He would have left it in the dark at night, in this dismal place, where every board has a voice. Think of it screaming in the darkness upstairs, while he sat glowering and listening and brooding. . . . Think of what *it* might have seen. . . ."

His voice sank away on the last words, and again there was a silence. But presently he rose. "I fancy we have sat here long enough," he said. "I don't like this room. There is something in it that is living still—a life which I'm afraid I helped to waken, which I roused at any rate to activity. I wonder if other people have felt it—if that is why it was closed for so long? I am not even going to look for the walled-up closet from which Tom Firbis took his fiddle. Let's go and play three-handed bridge with Miss Foy."

PART XI

JOIN HANDS AND BOW

THUS it happened that the dinner-party given by Pender about a month later served a two-fold purpose. It had been given, ostensibly, to celebrate the publication of Trefusis's poems, but it was also, in a way, a farewell gathering, for Pender and Miss Foy were leaving Ramoan next week.

After dinner, in a remote corner of the drawing-room, Cousin Nellie took Mrs. O'Clery into her confidence. "You see, we never really approved of the match—Rex is so very delicate. Besides—well, I always felt, and Theodore always felt, that they were not suited to each other. Of course I'm sorry for Rex; but what could we do? I saw from the beginning that Norah's feeling for him was *entirely* one of pity. Nobody could be fonder of Rex than I am, only, between ourselves, I—well, to be perfectly candid, I don't think he *ought* to marry. I know you'll understand what I mean."

"But I don't—in the least," replied Mrs. O'Clery, on a clear, bell-like note, which reduced Cousin Nellie to a fit of coughing in the hope of drowning it. "He's a nice man: I like him: everybody likes him: I've no idea in the world what this mystery can be which binds him to celibacy."

"I didn't say there was a mystery," Cousin Nellie returned in smothered accents, "and I've just told you how fond *I* am of him. But you surely don't think I ought to have encouraged Norah to sacrifice herself to a mistaken feeling of compassion?"

Mrs. O'Clery smiled cynically. "My dear, you must excuse me, but I don't quite see Norah sacrificing herself to anybody or anything. It takes all kinds to make a world, they say; but she isn't that kind—is she? If you want *my* candid opinion on the matter, I think they both behaved shabbily—I mean, Norah and George (though he *is* my nephew). And I hope they won't be in too great a hurry to announce this engagement of theirs."

"Of course, what I told you was in the strictest confidence," Cousin Nellie whispered angrily, for Mrs. O'Clery's tones still remained unmodified.

"I can quite understand that. It is not the sort of thing one would want to boast about. What I don't understand is why you couldn't—any of you—have known your own minds a little sooner: though I suppose George knew his."

"He has been *devoted* to her—all *along*," said Cousin Nellie.

"And you weren't devoted to him—is that the way of it?"

That, unfortunately, was very much the way of it, but Cousin Nellie none the less bitterly resented Mrs. O'Clery's interpretation. She had always detested her, but at least she had given her credit for a little *savoir-faire*. She regretted, now, having ever begun this mortifying conversation, which had involved her in so many explanations that it was impossible to break it off. "I thought it was only a boy and girl affair—between Norah and George," she pursued, with the inner rage of one who knows her words are wasted. "When I saw it was really serious—well, I felt it was my duty not to stand in their way any longer. . . . And as for the other—the separation was mutual; and I don't see why you should adopt such an attitude about it."

"I confess I was never so surprised in my life," Mrs. O'Clery admitted, "as when George arrived yesterday. That he should be here to-night, however, is possibly

more amazing still, though of course it is none of my business."

"Rex asked him to come," said Cousin Nellie. "I thought it was so nice of him—so nice of them both, for that matter. I see nothing whatever to be surprised at. I think it is—I think it is—beautiful."

Mrs. O'Clery's high, metallic laugh sounded through the room. "What are they going to live on?" she demanded, almost humorously. "George's prospects must have brightened wonderfully—or perhaps that is what is beautiful."

Cousin Nellie's face flushed to its richest carmine. She would, indeed, have risen from her chair and walked away, only she was sure Mrs. O'Clery would scream something after her, some dreadful question which would enlighten the whole room, and already Norah had cast more than one suspicious glance in their direction. It had seemed so safe, too, and so natural, and so very nearly necessary, to exchange views with Mrs. O'Clery, considering that George Best was her nephew, and what George and Norah's relations now were.

"Rex *wrote* to him—wrote to George," she whispered in a tremulous voice. "It was *he* who brought him back. Perhaps that will satisfy you."

Mrs. O'Clery raised two thin dark eyebrows. "I never required to be satisfied," she dropped, in a tone of faint surprise; "so far as Mr. Pender is concerned," she added unkindly. "And it would be quite like him, I dare say, to write, if he thought it would help the other two."

"Quite like him! Don't you believe me, then, when I say he *did* write?"

"Dear me, how touchy you are about it all! I'm sure I don't know what you want me to say, and still less what you want me to think—for I suppose you want me to think something, or you wouldn't have started."

But Cousin Nellie was spared a reply, for at that

moment Miss Foy approached them. Miss Tonie Ronayne, it appeared, had just despatched Trefusis as a scout to find out what the men were doing: she was beginning to get impatient. . . .

Meanwhile, in the dining-room, Professor Heron had been questioning Pender. "So you're really selling the house?"

"I don't know. I'm afraid it won't be easy to sell—even if I put it up for auction: and I'm afraid it will be quite as difficult to let. It is too big for most people, and its appearance is against it."

"Its appearance?"

"It is rather dark and gloomy-looking, don't you think? But I dare say I am prejudiced."

"Not prejudiced *against* it!" the Canon put in with mild astonishment. "You seemed so taken with it at first. We made sure you were going to settle down here permanently."

"Oh, I like it all right, of course," Pender said hastily. "It is only that I would rather have something brighter and—well, perhaps cosier."

"I once stayed in a house," began Professor Heron, "which was reputed to be haunted."

He paused, rather oddly. It was as if he had intercepted the glance which had passed between Pender and Olphert. At any rate, instead of continuing his story he merely added, "I don't know why I should have thought of it now. It must have been your remark about Ramoan having a gloomy appearance, though the house I refer to, the haunted house, was not, so far as I remember, in the least gloomy."

Olphert had been languidly, though steadily, cracking walnuts. "Why should it be?" he interposed. "If there are ghosts at all, there must be ghosts everywhere: there must be six in this room at the present moment, just as there are six bodies, and six skeletons."

"Cheerful thought that, Olphert!" Captain Chaffinch congratulated him.

But the Canon wanted Professor Heron's story. "You were going to tell us?" he insinuated.

"Oh, nothing—nothing," the Professor beamed; "the ghosts weren't in my part of the house, as I discovered afterwards. All that happened was that I caught a bad cold looking for one."

But the Canon was not to be put off. He had a taste for the marvellous; moreover, a story of his own was beginning to shape itself dimly in memory. "Still, if you went to the length of looking?" he urged politely.

"Yes, yes, I looked," the Professor chuckled. "You see, I wakened very early in the morning, and unfortunately it was just light enough to show me that my bedroom door, which I never leave open at night, was certainly open now. So I simply had to have a peep. There was a long draughty passage outside, and in that gray twilight of dawn it looked, I must say, distinctly eerie. I didn't venture very far; I didn't like the look of the staircase at all; in fact, I just waited long enough to catch cold." His bright eyes twinkled for a moment from his host to Olphert.

"You didn't actually see anything, then?" the Canon sighed in disappointment.

"No, not a glimmer, not a shred, not the hem of a vanishing garment, though I hung over the well of the staircase and looked down into the hall. It was all very gray and shadowy. It struck me that it was the right moment, the right place; and I had a curious impression that the old owners of the house had never really vacated it. Of course if I had known its peculiar reputation I might have been more successful, but I did not learn about that till breakfast-time."

"Haven't you to be—eh—what they call psychic or somethin', to really see anythin'?" Captain Chaffinch suggested, with a half defiant glance round the little circle of intellectuals.

"Perhaps—perhaps," the Canon admitted. "There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy. . . ."

"As a matter of fact, my experience—I mean the accident of my door opening—had nothing to do with the haunting," Professor Heron went on, as if the round-eyed seriousness of the Canon demanded a corresponding candour on his part. "The haunting, as I understand, was confined strictly to one room, and of course I hadn't been given that room. Besides, what Captain Chaffinch says seems certainly to have been true in this case. So far as I could discover only one person then in the house had seen anything, and he had seen always the same thing, the same little drama re-enacted each night. I remember a detail, however, which struck me at the time. The room was papered, and before anything happened this paper changed, the pattern in it disappeared, and another and much larger pattern, with a running frieze of peacocks, took its place."

"But—how d'you account for it?" said Captain Chaffinch. "I mean—dash it all—a wall-paper can't have a ghost."

"One might say," the Canon commenced. But he could think of nothing except the quotation he had already used, and relapsed into silence.

"It is not, perhaps, exactly that the paper has a ghost," said Professor Heron, after waiting politely for the Canon to conclude his remark. "It is rather, isn't it? that it was connected once, for somebody, with an emotion—hatred, joy, fear—an emotion, at all events, strong enough to survive, to reach another mind. The whole thing is a vision, doubtless, but some infection from the past, lingering in the atmosphere of the room, evoked this vision in a consciousness sufficiently sensitive. . . . Doctor Olphert, however, will tell you this is all nonsense, and I dare say he is right."

"No—no," Olphert disclaimed. "To me it is neither sense nor nonsense; it is merely vague. Besides, I have no quarrel with the wildest nonsense so long as it is not enunciated as truth."

"Ah, well, we won't enunciate it, we can't enunciate it."

"Do you yourself happen to think it nonsense?" Olphert inquired.

"My explanation, or the apparition?"

"Both."

"Well, for my explanation—as I told you, I don't think much of it. But the ghosts!" he glanced round the table gaily. "How, after all, can I dismiss *them* as nonsense, when I certainly was frightened to sleep in the haunted room. I had every opportunity to do so, you know; it was pressed upon me, but I declined. If I am to be contemptuous and sceptical I shall have to keep that little fact a secret, shan't I?"

"The explanation seems to be based on some kind of telepathic principle," Olphert observed.

"Of course, the existence of telepathy *has* been fairly well established, hasn't it?"

"Possibly; but not a telepathy that lingers on in this mysterious fashion, like the tune in a gramophone record. What is there to *take* the original impression? Not the empty air, which must constantly be changing. There remain the walls, the furniture. . . ."

"You're all to come to the drawing-room," said Trefusis from the door. "They want to play bridge—at least, Miss Ronayne does."

"And we've settled nothing," Pender deplored. "We have even, rather good-naturedly, left Olphert with the last word."

The Canon raised his wine-glass to his lips. "There is no last word," he said. "*Solum ut inter ista certum sit nihil esse certi.*"

But Trefusis rather pertly reminded him, "It's quite certain that Miss Ronayne wants to play bridge."

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